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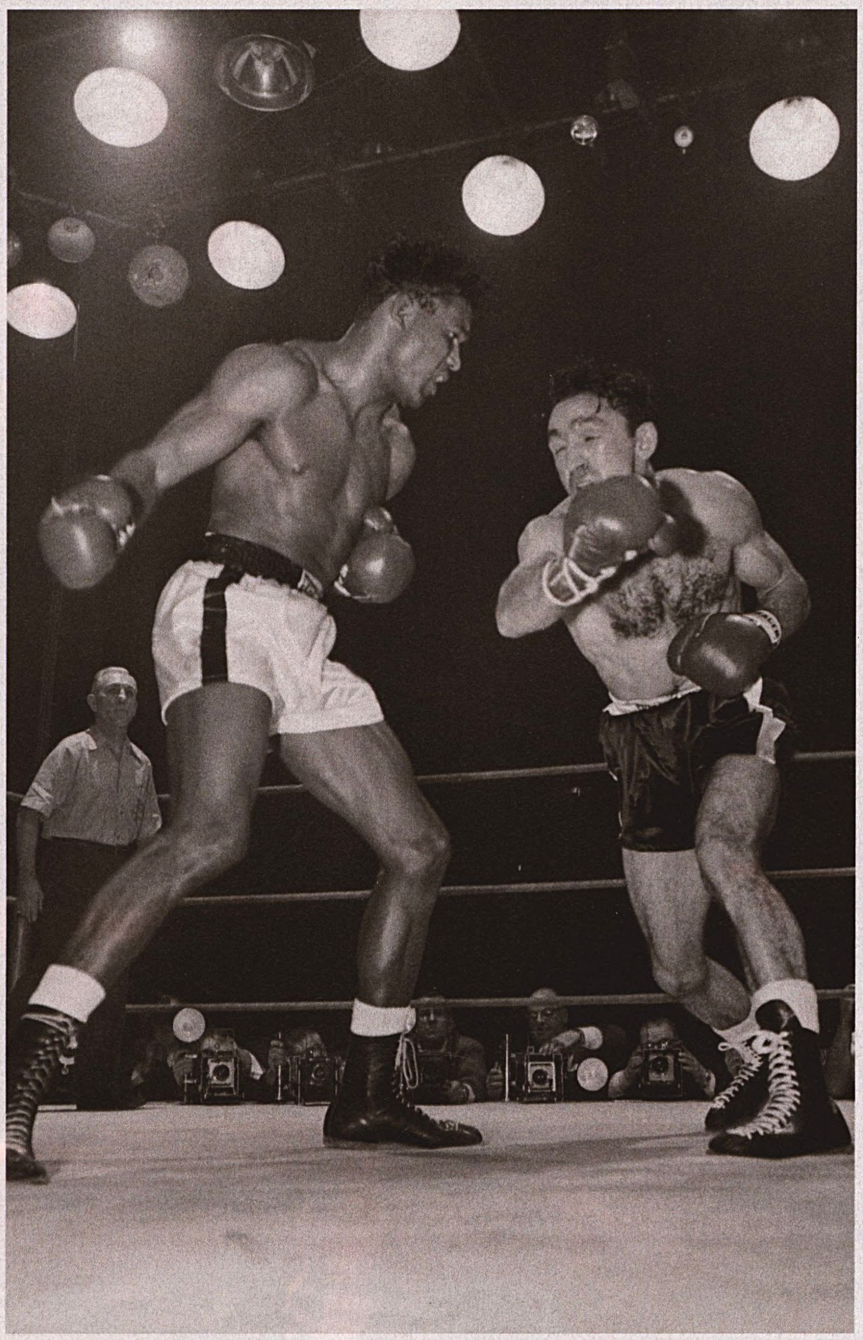

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Sugar Ray Robinson and Carmen Basilio split back-to-back 15-round battles in 1957 and '58 but never fought a rubber match.

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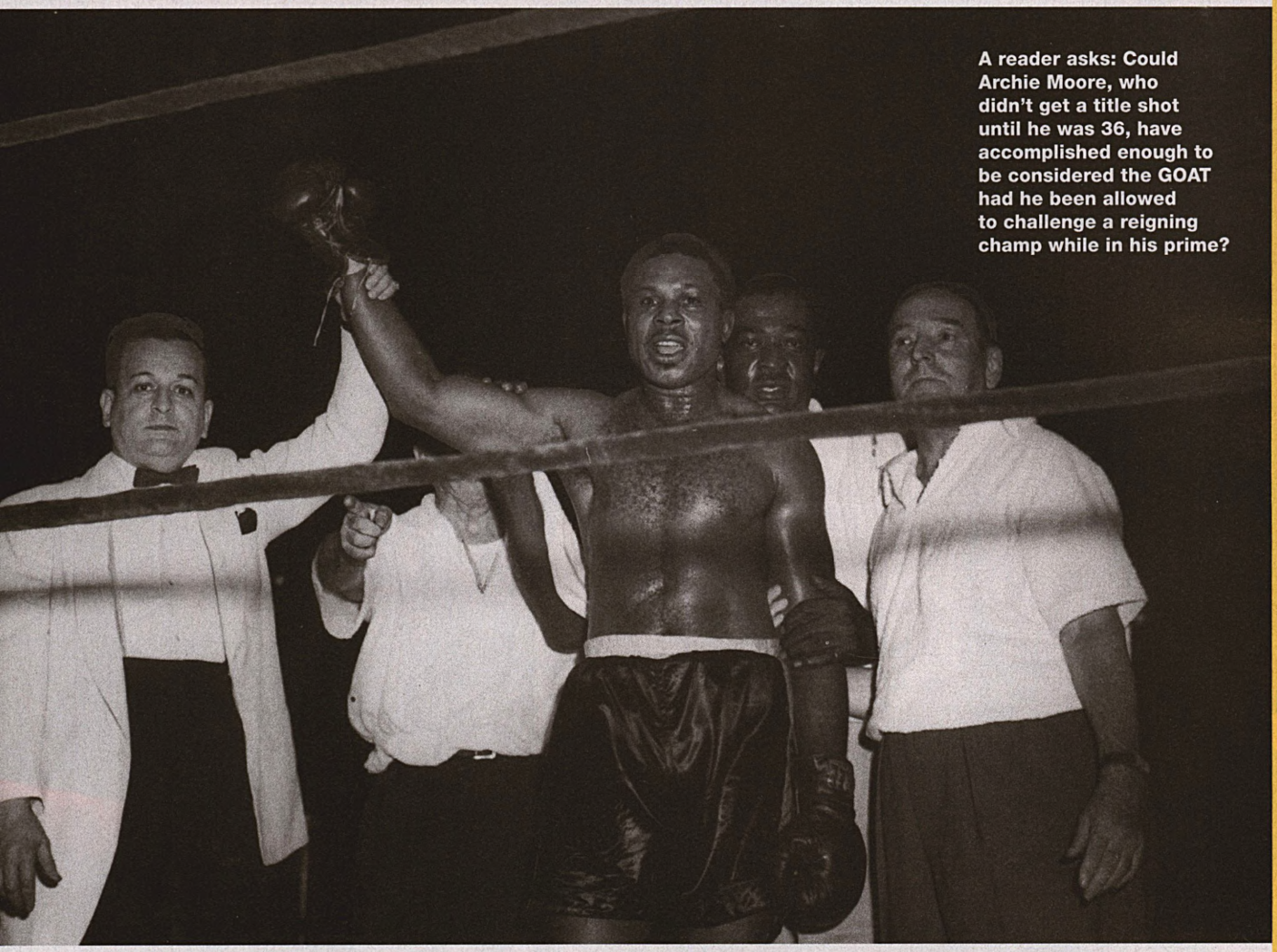
Vergil Ortiz Jr. and veteran Antonio Orozco put on a rousing show during their DAZN-streamed welterweight main event on August 10 at Verizon Theatre in Grand Prairie, Texas, but it was Ortiz – the 21-year-old hometown hero – who prevailed by sixth-round KO.

TOM HOGAN/GOLDEN BOY



A reader asks: Could Archie Moore, who didn't get a title shot until he was 36, have accomplished enough to be considered the GOAT had he been allowed to challenge a reigning champ while in his prime?

ALL MEANS ALL

With all this debate lately about who the greatest of all time is, I notice some people only know about the current times. How can you debate about ALL time when you only know about one time? Many fighters can make a good case for themselves, but I'm going to make a case for a fighter people today don't know much about, Archie Moore. The Ole Mongoose fought at a time when black fighters rarely got title shots. Moore didn't get his until he was 36. When he won the light heavyweight title at 36, he defended it for nearly a decade! What if he got his title shot at 26 instead of 36? How many records would he still hold today? He already has the unbreakable record of the most knockouts (141) in boxing history. I think he should at least get consideration. People who only know about one time shouldn't even mention ALL time.

Victor Rivero
vicrivero22@yahoo.com

Editor's note: Moore's knockout tally varies slightly depending on the source (Boxrec.com lists it at 132, Wikipedia 131, IBHOF 141), and some give the all-time record to England's Billy Bird, who racked up 138 knockouts (according to Boxrec, at least) between 1920-1948. Either way, the Ole Mongoose's all-time greatness is completely unaffected.

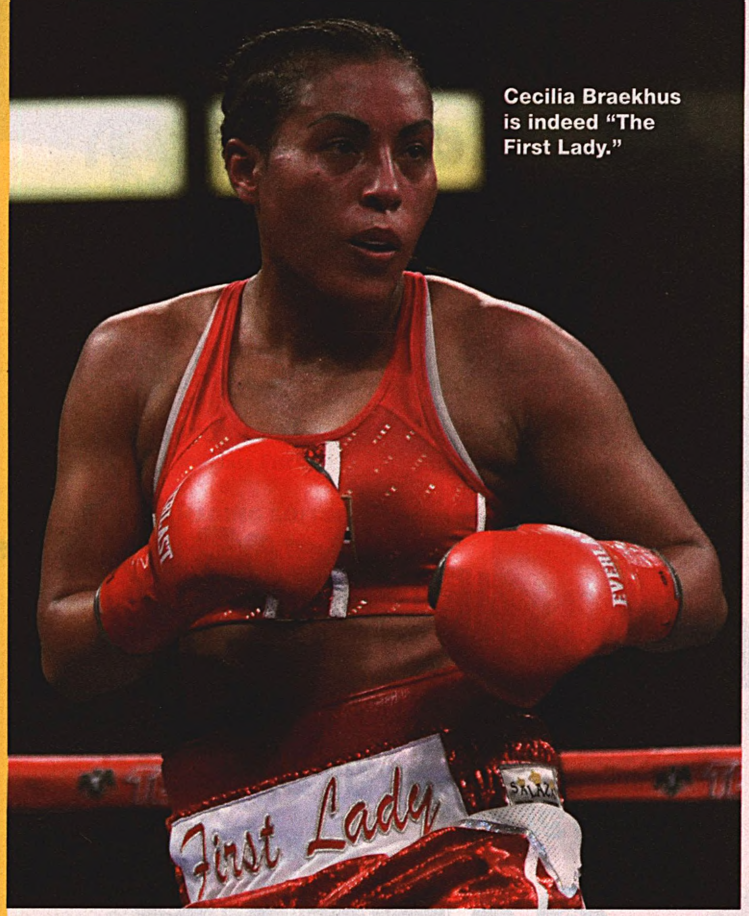
WHO'S THE BADDEST?

I realize that there are too few females doing professional boxing. Nevertheless, as a Norwegian, I challenge you to start a pound-for-pound rating for the ladies. Naturally I consider Celilia Brækhus as number one.

Stein Gustavsen
Norway

Editor's response: For a long time, writer Tom Gerbasi included a pound-for-pound list with his features on women's boxing in The Ring. It's probably something we'll start doing again, along with recognizing more women as champions in their divisions. In the meantime, Mr. Gerbasi accepted your challenge and provided his current list:

1. *Cecilia Braekhus*
2. *Claressa Shields*
3. *Katie Taylor*
4. *Amanda Serrano*
5. *Yesica Yolanda Bopp*
6. *Delfine Persoon*
7. *Mariana Juarez*
8. *Layla McCarter*
9. *Jelena Mrdjenovich*
10. *Daniela Bermudez*



Cecilia Braekhus is indeed "The First Lady."

POTTY-MOUTH DOUGIE

While I was happy to see the reverence shown to Pernell Whitaker and Rocky Marciano, I was disappointed that there was not a feature devoted to the 100-year anniversary of the Dempsey-Willard battle or any mention of the re-enactment of the fight celebrated in Toledo. Maybe in a future issue. More troubling than that was Doug Fischer's use of the word "shit" in the subtitle of a feature story. Now, I'm not one to be offended by off-color language, but I don't know … it just seemed unprofessional. I'm 40 years old, been reading The Ring for 30 years, and I can't imagine guys like Steve Farhood, Nigel Collins or Bert Sugar doing something like that. OK, maybe Bert Sugar.

Sean Newman
newmanduke@yahoo.com

Editor-In-Chief's response: Hey Sean, I apologize for "troubling" you with my choice of words for the subtitle to my commentary piece on Manny Paquiao's impressive performance against Keith Thurman, which led to my reconsidering his all-time great status. I tend to "let my hands go" a little more in terms of tone and language when penning commentary as opposed to news stories and straight feature articles, but I never want to deliberately turn the reader off. I originally used the "shit list to ATG list" line as a working dek, a placeholder for something more professional or clever, really, and I didn't expect my fellow editors or the magazine's proofreader to sign off on it, but they either liked it or they were afraid to irk the "bossman" by nixing it. Either way, the bad word remained, and I'm sorry to anyone who was offended by it being prominently placed as it was. If it's any consolation, I dropped an F-bomb in the body of the story that was flagged and edited out, so we're not complete degenerates here at Ring Magazine… not yet, anyway. Regarding the Dempsey-Willard anniversary, Associate Editor Tom Gray was ahead of other outlets in publishing an archive piece on our website, RingTV.com. On these pages, we will honor the anniversary dates of significant fights whenever possible.

Guilty copy-editor's response: The subtitle seemed like a good idea at the time. But if you were troubled by that word, it was nothing compared to the people enraged by the question mark on the cover ("Manny Pacquiao: All-time great?") — punctuation that made sense if you read Doug's story.

THANKS, FRANK

Just a quick word to your editorial staff to let you know how much I appreciate the hard work that goes into putting together Ring Magazine. It's refreshing to read such a well put-together magazine that delivers an outstanding compilation of boxing rankings, as well as very interesting stories of boxers in the industry. In a sport where sometimes the decision that was made by the judges is very questionable, there is no doubt that your magazine is a clear winner! Thank you!

A lifelong subscriber,
Frank Crouch

TWEET OF THE MONTH

WRITE TO THE RING! Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 90254, Brooklyn, NY 11209 comeoutwriting@gmail.com ★ Emailed letters will include a writer's email address unless a city and state of origin are provided. Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity.

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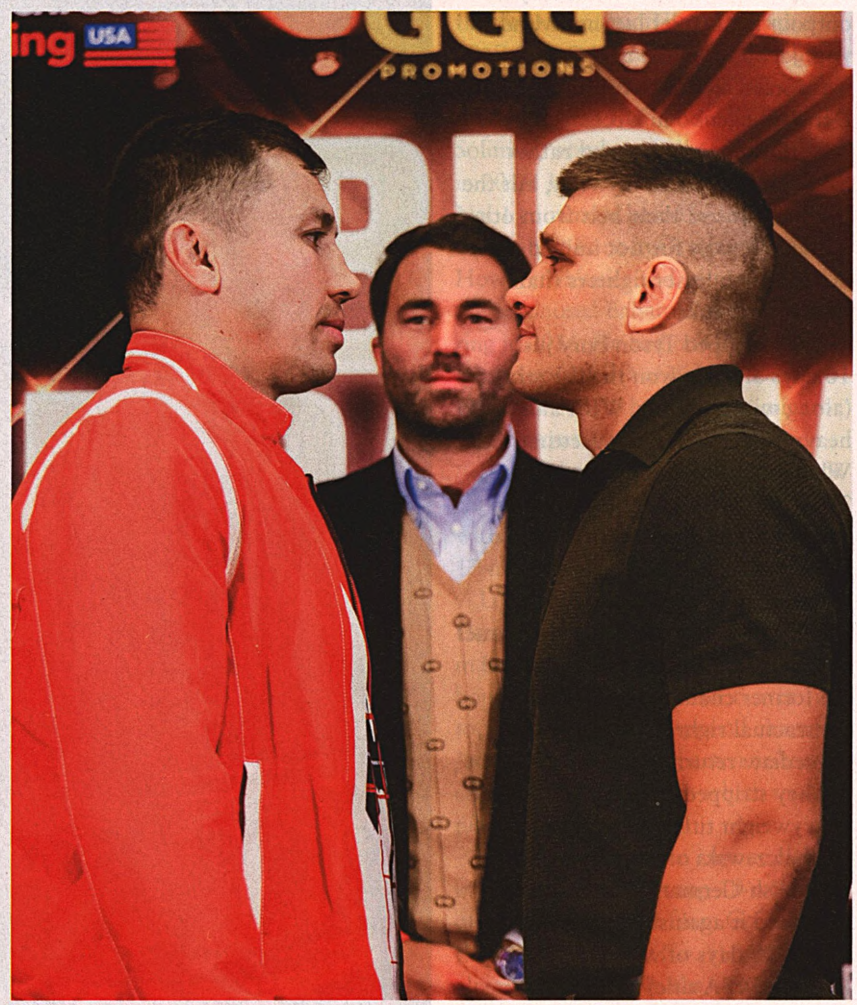
RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

WTF, IBF?



The guy on the right gets a second IBF title shot in less than a year.

The International Boxing Federation must really think highly of Sergiy Derevyanchenko.

In a span of just 14 months, the New Jersey-based sanctioning organization has stripped two unified middleweight champions (and two of the sport's biggest attractions) – this month's cover subjects, Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez – for not defending the IBF title against Derevyanchenko within their mandatory deadlines.

Golovkin was stripped of the IBF belt last June after he opted to take on Alvarez in their anticipated (and very lucrative) September rematch rather than agree to face Derevyanchenko within a 90-day extension period the sanctioning body granted (for $20,000) to allow the Kazakhstani hero to fight Vanes Martirosyan on the May 5 date originally intended for the Alvarez return bout. (Mind you, it wasn't Golovkin's fault that he didn't take on Canelo, his WBC mandatory, on Cinco De Mayo in Las Vegas; the Mexican star's positive clenbuterol tests and subsequent Nevada Athletic Commission suspension scuttled that

PPV date).

Alvarez was stripped of the IBF strap in August after talks for a mandatory defense against Derevyanchenko failed (over money, of course) less than three months after he won the title by outpointing Daniel Jacobs. (Mind you, Jacobs won the title Golovkin was forced to vacate by outpointing Derevyanchenko in December.)

Both strippings seemed rather hasty and unfair in my view, but the IBF has yanked their belt from other unified champs for not immediately facing much lesser fighters than Derevyanchenko.

They stripped Tyson Fury just 10 days after he won the IBF strap (along with the Ring, WBA and WBO heavyweight titles) by upsetting Wladimir Klitschko in November 2015. Why? Because he didn't agree to immediately face their No. 1 contender, Vyacheslav Glazkov. (Mind you, to get the shot at Klitschko, Fury had to sign a contract that included a rematch clause, and the former champ exercised his contractual right to engage in an immediate return bout.)

They stripped reigning WBO light heavyweight titleholder Dariusz Michalczewski of their belt when the Polish-German standout failed to defend it against William Guthrie within 30 days of winning the strap (and the WBA title) by outpointing Virgil Hill in June 1997.

Is Andy Ruiz next? Will the IBF strip him for not facing their current No. 1 heavyweight contender, Kubrat Pulev, before the modern-day Cinderella Man takes on Anthony Joshua in their anticipated rematch on December 7?

Would there be any outrage among fans or media if they did? There wasn't that much of a social media uproar when Alvarez and Golovkin were stripped, and I recognize three reasons for the mix of apathy and ambivalence:

1) We've come to expect shenanigans from sanctioning organizations.

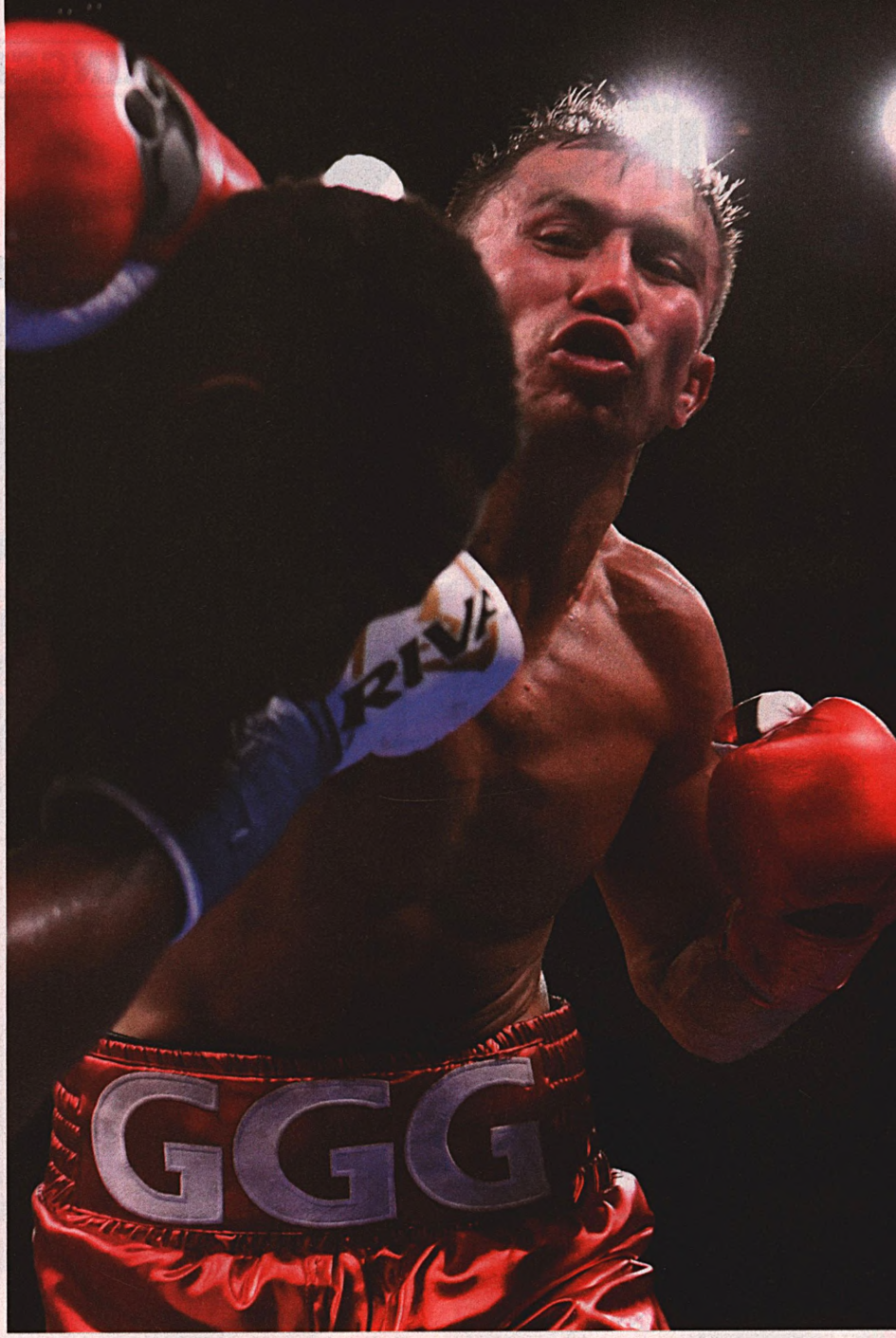
2) Both Canelo and GGG have legions of haters who delight in their misfortune.

3) The IBF followed its mandatory challenger bylaws in stripping the middleweight stars, and given how other sanctioning bodies seem to make up their rules as it suits their bank accounts, some fans and media applauded their decision.

I understand that third reason. But while I'm all for sanctioning bodies following their rules, I think a newly crowned titleholder (especially a unified champ) deserves some time to decide what he or she does next, and I firmly believe that it's wrong to strip them for not facing a "mandatory challenger" that has no business being the No. 1 contender.

It could be argued that Glazkov and Guthrie had no business being in anybody's top 10, let alone the IBF's ratings.

Guthrie fought Darrin Allen for the vacant IBF 175-pound title in July 1997, earning the strap with a third-round stoppage. Neither had faced anyone resembling a top-10 contender prior to that fight. Guthrie was knocked out in back-to-back bouts against world-class veterans Reggie Johnson and Michael Nunn in



GGG and Canelo outpointed Daniel Jacobs in bouts sanctioned by the IBF, which stripped them for not facing a guy Jacobs beat.

1998 and '99 respectively.

Glazkov, who took on a few fringe contenders (then-unbeaten Malik Scott and former cruiserweight champs Tomasz Adamek and Steve Cunningham) on his way to the top spot in the IBF's heavyweight rankings, faced Charles Martin for the vacant title in January 2016. Martin, who had faced nobody prior to that shot, won the belt with a third-round TKO when Glazkov suffered a knee injury, and then handed it over to then-prospect Anthony Joshua three months later for a buttload of money. Glazkov hasn't fought since losing to Martin, one of the worst major world titleholders in history.

I'm not saying Derevyanchenko (13-1, 10 KOs) is a pretender, as Guthrie and Glazkov proved to be. The Ukrainian pressure fighter, who had an extensive amateur career, proved to be a legit contender by pushing Jacobs to the limit. He's currently The Ring's No. 6-rated middleweight.

But how did he first become the IBF's mandatory challenger, and why is he already back in that position?

Derevyanchenko stopped Tureano Johnson in the 12th round of an IBF title-elimination bout in August 2017. The only notable name on his record going into that fight was the shell of former IBF beltholder Sam Soliman, who lasted all of two rounds in 2016. Johnson had been the IBF No. 1 contender based on outpointing Eamonn O'Kane in October 2015. However, injuries and surgeries kept the hardnosed Bahamian out of the ring in 2016. He had one fight – a second-round KO of Fabian Soares in February 2017 – before the eliminator vs. Derevyanchenko.

How Johnson was ranked (let alone eligible for a title elimination bout) with one bout (vs. a journeyman) in a 17-month span is anyone's guess.

I can't figure out how Derevyanchenko recaptured the mandatory challenger status with one bout – a unanimous decision over former European 154-pound champ Jack Culcay, who has beaten nobody of note at 160 pounds – which took place in April.

Doesn't the IBF have anyone else in their middleweight top 10 worthy of a title shot? Apart from Golovkin (No. 3) and Jacobs (No. 5), who have already held the belt, the answer is no. Kamil Szeremeta (No. 4), Patrick Wojcicki (No. 6), Esquiva Falcao, Steven Butler, Patrice Volny and Meiirim Nursultanov (Nos. 7-10) don't have a single significant victory between them.

And that's my main problem with patting the IBF on the back for "following their rules." What good are those mandatory challenger rules when their rankings are suspect?

Rhetorical question. Looking on the bright side of all this stripping nonsense, in what appears to be an accidental twist of justice, Golovkin will get a shot at the vacant IBF belt that was stripped from him when he faces Derevyanchenko on October 5.

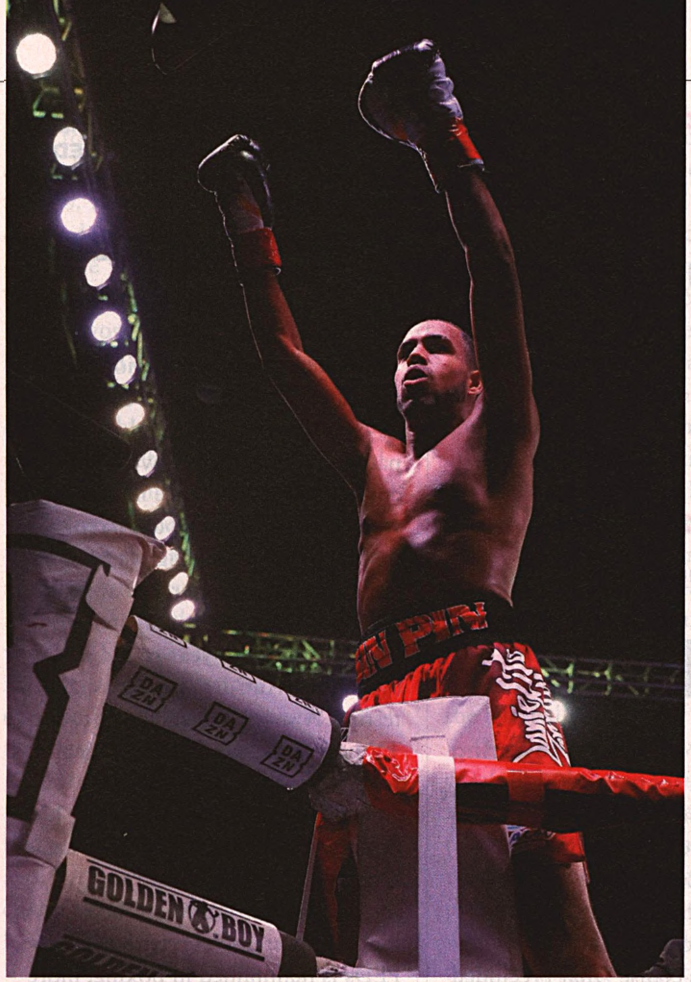
ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

VERGIL ORTIZ JR.

Ortiz looks like a future welterweight world-beater after only 14 pro bouts, none of which have gone past six rounds.

Vergil Ortiz Jr. was viewed as Golden Boy's top prospect going into his crossroads bout with Antonio Orozco on August 10. Many fans now see the 21-year-old Texan as the best prospect in the sport following his sixth-round stoppage of the battle-tested veteran, whose only previous loss was a spirited 12-round decision to current unified 140-pound titleholder Jose Ramirez. Ortiz (14-0, 14 KOs) boxed a clinical but punishing fight, stunning the veteran in the opening round and withstanding Orozco's pressure and body attack before closing the show with three knockdowns in Round 6. The two-fisted assault that overwhelmed Orozco (28-2, 17 KOs) is what fans expect from Ortiz, who had dispatched his previous 13 opponents in five rounds or less. However, against Orozco he proved he could work patiently behind a jab, control distance, set traps and counterpunch; Ortiz put forth a complete performance that entertained a packed arena in his hometown of Grand Prairie. But the young welterweight still saw room for improvement, suggesting he won't remain a prospect for long.



Zorilla's dedication to learning his craft makes him one of Puerto Rico's top up-and-comers.

NEW FACES

DANIELITO ZORRILLA

By Anson Wainwright

Puerto Rican junior welterweight Danielito Zorrilla is regarded in some quarters as the best prospect on the boxing-hungry island. Earlier this year, Zorrilla (12-0, 10 knockouts) went some way toward proving that, stepping up to face his best opponent to date with an eye-catching performance in California.

"So far, all my nights have been successful," Zorrilla told The Ring through Bryan Perez, executive director of Miguel Cotto Promotions. "I beat a former (WBC junior lightweight) world champion (Gamaliel Diaz) on a big stage and on a big platform like DAZN."

Since then, "El Zorro" has taken Juan Carlos Cordones' unbeaten record in a homecoming performance, stopping the Dominican fighter in three rounds.

The well-rounded Zorilla has greatly impressed Jose Sanchez Fournier, one of Puerto Rico's top boxing journalists, who writes for El Nuevo Dia and is an analyst and color commentator for WAPA TV.

"I think Zorrilla is probably Puerto Rico's best prospect," said Fournier. "He has a pretty solid technical background from the amateurs.

"He's not a knockout artist, but he can bang with both hands. He seems to be very disciplined with training and has been getting better and better. He hasn't faced top-tier opposition yet, but he seems to be continually improving.

"Fighters like (two-time Olympian and current junior bantamweight contender) Jeyvier Cintron and (junior welterweight contender) Subriel Matias are further up the road to a title shot. I believe Zorrilla is the most polished of the three. He can't bang as much as Subriel and he can't box as much as Cintron, but he's a stronger fighter than Cintron and a much better technical fighter than Subriel."

Zorrilla grew up in a big family in Toa Baja, which is located on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. His mother was a housewife, while his father supported the family by working in construction.

He was a natural athlete and found his love for boxing at 13 watching future promoter Miguel Cotto. Cotto and former three-weight champ Felix Trinidad are his idols.

Zorrilla flourished as an amateur, winning eight national titles. He also fought internationally, claiming bronze at the Pan American Championships in 2013 and silver in 2015. That same year, he reached the quarterfinals of the World Championships and narrowly failed to qualify for the 2016 Olympics. He exited the amateur scene in the fall of 2016 with a record of 192-16.

To his credit, he has taken all of that experience and added to it valuable sparring with reigning IBF 130-pound titlist Tevin Farmer and former beltholders Rocky Martinez, Alberto Machado, Jose Pedraza and Javier Fortuna.

His manager/trainer, David Oyola, is pleased with his fighter's development during this time.

"The thought of being almost perfect in the ring entails a lot of sacrifice, a lot of discipline and a lot of time in the gym," said Oyola. "He is very disciplined, and he always wants to give a little more in every training session."

Zorrilla is married and has two young children, which undoubtedly helps keep him grounded. The gym rat is focused on becoming a complete fighter.

"I want to improve in everything," said the 25-year-old boxer-puncher. "I want to be better and almost perfect in both defense and offense."

Cotto feels that Zorrilla is his company's next world champion and predicts big things in the coming months and years.

"Danielito has all the skills to become a star in boxing; he is the future of Puerto Rico," said the former champion-turned-promoter unabashedly. "He is smart, well-disciplined and dedicated. He has it all to become a major attraction."

Zorrilla doesn't see that as added pressure and believes he can make good on Cotto's lofty aspirations for him.

"My goal is to be a world champion," Zorrilla said. "I want to obtain all the titles in a division and be undisputed champion."

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

AL HAYMON AND MARVIN MILLER

The former MLB players association director dropped the ball on PED testing. Could PBC's boss pick it up for boxing?

Marvin Miller is a towering figure in sports history. In 1966 when he was elected executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association, players were bound to their club by a "reserve clause" that precluded free negotiation. Pensions were negligible. Most labor issues were resolved by club owners in a dictatorial manner.

In 1968, Miller negotiated the first collective bargaining agreement in the history of professional sports. That began the process of laying a foundation for an effective labor movement. In 1970, the average salary for a Major League Baseball player was $29,303. In 2018, it was $4,095,686.

But there was one area where Miller failed the players he represented. He steadfastly opposed meaningful testing for performance-enhancing drugs. In part, his position was born of the fear that players who used recreational drugs might be snared in the dragnet. But as a consequence of his intransigence on the issue, a wave of steroid abuse washed over baseball. Records were tainted. "Clean" players were put at a competitive disadvantage. And the health of users was jeopardized.

It's no secret that the use of illegal performance-enhancing drugs plagues boxing today. But we're not talking about hitting a baseball further. We're talking about fighters getting hit in the head harder.

Al Haymon could take a big step toward changing that.

Like Miller, Haymon has delivered increased purses to the athletes he represents. But over the years, he has shown no inclination to eliminate illegal PED use from boxing. To the contrary, from a questionable alliance with USADA to providing a protective umbrella for fighters who have "missed" tests, he has contributed to exacerbating the PED problem.

Premier Boxing Champions, more than any other promoter, controls its own universe. PBC and its TV partners – Fox and Showtime – could make a difference now if they wanted to. All they would have to do is say that, to be eligible to fight under the PBC banner and appear on Showtime or Fox, a fighter would have to submit to year-round VADA (Voluntary Anti-Doping Association) testing. A small percentage of each TV license fee would be sufficient to fund the entire program.

Will Haymon press the issue? I doubt it. And that's a shame. Because if he did, it would be his most important contribution to boxing. As long as the status quo with regard to PEDs is maintained in boxing, more fighters than would otherwise be the case – including some PBC fighters – will suffer brain damage.

★★★

On June 26, the WBC announced that it had created yet another category of "world champion" and designated Canelo Alvarez as its first "franchise champion." This paved the way for "interim champion" Jermall Charlo to become the regular WBC "world champion." As explained by the WBC, "A Franchise Champion shall enjoy special status with respect to his or her mandatory obligations, holding multiple titles, and competing for titles of other organizations as the WBC Board of Governors rules on a case-by-case basis."

Let's call this move for what it is – a shameless grab for more sanctioning fees. And worse.

In creating a loophole to exempt "franchise champions" from mandatory challenges, the WBC is coddling big-money names who

want to avoid certain fighters. For example, Dillian Whyte has been the No. 1-ranked WBC heavyweight contender for more than 600 days. But if the WBC labels Deontay Wilder a "franchise champion," Wilder won't have to fight Whyte. That would open the door for Whyte to fight for the WBC "world" championship, and the Whyte camp might be satisfied. But boxing would be further diminished in the process.

Carlos Acevedo has written, "Although the sanctioning bodies are nothing but corrupt, senseless and avaricious, they do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of the boxing industry and are propped up by everybody involved in the fight racket from top to bottom."

So true.

Meanwhile, if the sanctioning bodies had been around decades ago, here's what the heavyweight championship picture might have looked like:

Franchise Champion:
Joe Louis
Super World Champion:
JerseyJoe Walcott
Diamond World Champion:
Ezzard Charles
Regular World Champion:
Lee Savold
World Champion Emeritus:
James Braddock
World Champion-in-Recess:
Arturo Godoy
Gold World Champion:
Tami Mauriello
Silver World Champion:
Lee Oma
Interim World Champion:
Tony Galento

And all of them would have been paying sanctioning fees. I guess the mob that ran boxing back then never really maximized its income.

★★★

Jim Bouton, the iconoclastic pitcher whose major league career peaked when he compiled a 21-7 record and 2.53 ERA for the New York Yankees in 1963, died on July 10 at age 80.

Bouton had a social conscience and was outspoken about it. He played for the Yankees from 1962 through 1968 and briefly for the Seattle Pilots, Houston Astros and Atlanta Braves afterward. But his most lasting contribution to the game was as the author of a memoir entitled Ball Four.

Ball Four chronicled Bouton's career in the major leagues through the end of the 1969 season. Much of it was devoted to his years with the Yankees when the Bronx Bombers – led by Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, Roger Maris and Whitey Ford – ruled the baseball world.

The book stripped away the carefully cultivated image of major league players as boy scouts. It recounted in detailed fashion more than a few sordid goings-on, from profligate womanizing to players who took the field while hungover from a drinking binge the night before. It took aim at some not-very-bright managers and criticized a repressive economic structure that left players at the mercy of avaricious club owners. It was enlightening, poignant and funny.

The baseball establishment and many of Bouton's fellow players viewed Ball Four as a betrayal of the code of silence characteristic of professional sports at that time. Dick Young (an old-school columnist for the New York Daily News) branded him a "social leper." The next time Pete Rose saw Bouton, he shouted out, "Fuck you, Shakespeare."

But the public loved it. After a small first printing of 5,000 copies, Ball Four rocketed past the million mark in sales and became part of a revolution that changed sportswriting. In 2002, Sports Illustrated ranked it in the No. 3 slot on a list of the best sports books of all time.

All sports fans and sports writers – boxing fans and boxing writers included – owe Jim Bouton a debt of gratitude.

★★★

A quirky memory regarding Pernell Whitaker, who died after being hit by a car in Virginia Beach on July 14:

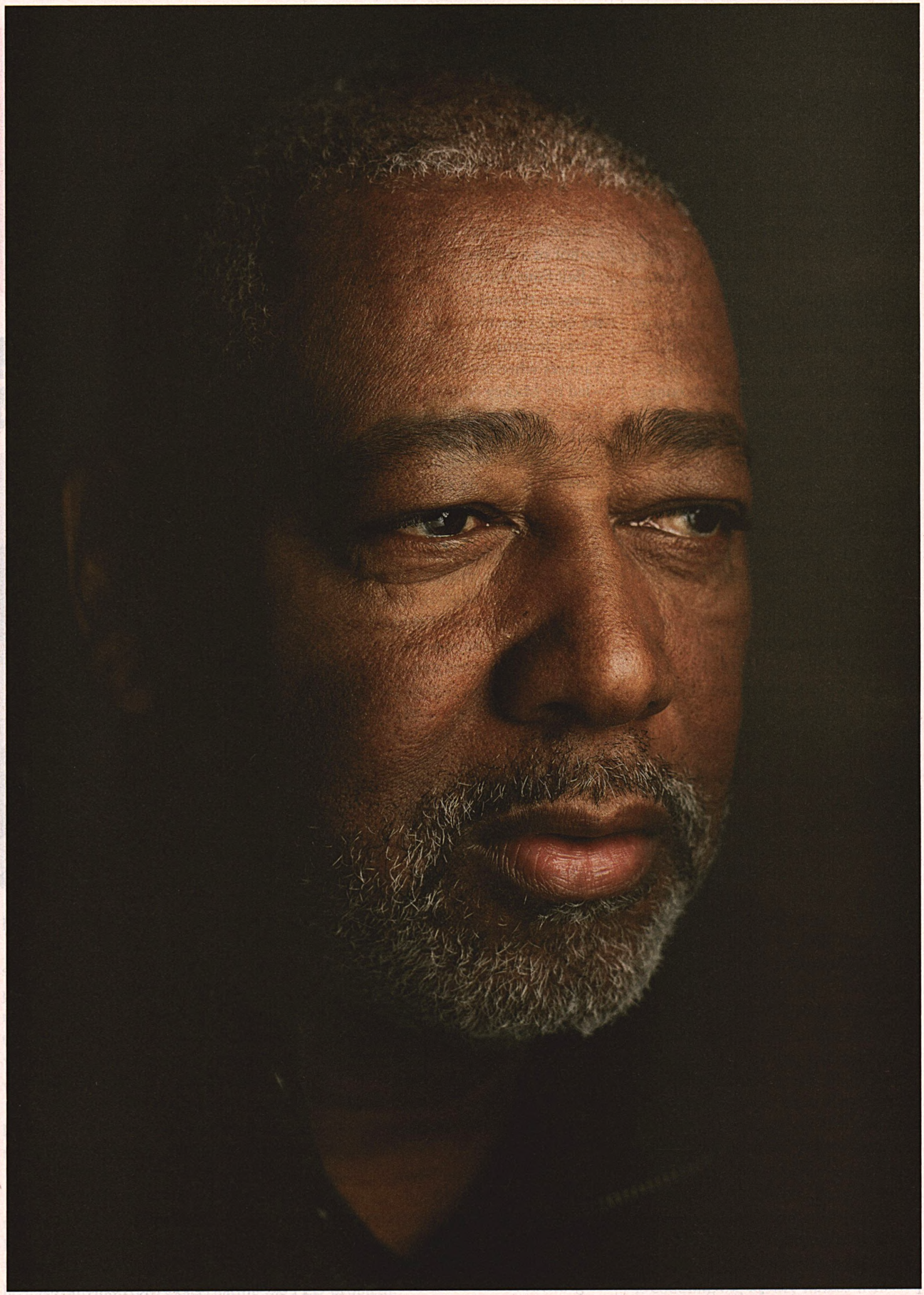
Whitaker was a great fighter in an era when greatness had to be earned in the ring, not bestowed by publicity and hype. After winning a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics, he won titles in four weight classes as a pro and stood atop boxing's pound-for-pound list until he was supplanted by Roy Jones Jr.

Pernell was honored twice by the Boxing Writers Association of America as "Fighter of the Year." In spring 1994, I was at the second of those occasions. The pre-dinner VIP reception was underway. And a jagged fingernail was making me uncomfortable. I had a small emery board in my suit jacket pocket. But I didn't feel like leaving the reception, filing down the nail in a hallway, and having to make my way past security to get into the reception again. On the other hand, filing my nails in the middle of a room populated by the boxing elite didn't seem like a good idea. So I moved to a corner, took the emery board from my pocket, and began filing as unobtrusively as possible.

That was when Whitaker walked by, did a double take and blurted out, "Oh, man. Can I use that? I got a fingernail that's driving me crazy."

Let others remember Pernell Whitaker in the ring working his magic against Julio Cesar Chavez, Azumah Nelson and Buddy McGirt. I'll remember the night he borrowed my emery board. RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – A Dangerous Journey: Another Year Inside Boxing – has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.



THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOJTEK URBANEK ★ TEXT BY THOMAS HAUSER

SAM WATSON: "AL IS MY BEST FRIEND, BUT I'M NOT AL HAYMON. I'M ME."

His face isn't as recognizable as Don King's. But he shows up in a boxing ring with far greater frequency these days than King does. And no, that's not Al Haymon. It's Sam Watson.

Watson is the public face of Premier Boxing Champions. In that regard, he's an extension of Al Haymon. But he has a very different background and persona.

Unlike Haymon, Watson didn't go to Harvard. Much of his early education came on the streets. He has good people skills and relates well to fighters because he knows the world that they come from. He's the yin to Haymon's yang. Al is a recluse who recoils from the camera. Sam is an extrovert who loves it.

Watson and Haymon met in the early 1980s when Al was in the music business. They've been friends ever since. When Haymon got into boxing as an adviser to Vernon Forrest, Watson began working with him in that arena. The job involves more than dealing with fighters. There are aspects of PBC's business that the world doesn't see. Sam has a hand in many behind-the-scenes endeavors. He stays in his lane, but it's a wide lane. He knows when to be quiet and rarely shows all of his cards.

Watson fits easily into the role of father, brother and friend. People like him. His word is good. He's intensely loyal to Haymon, and vice versa. They'd go to war for each other.

Watson is reliable. He does what he says he'll do. He's a good ally. You wouldn't want him as an enemy. RING

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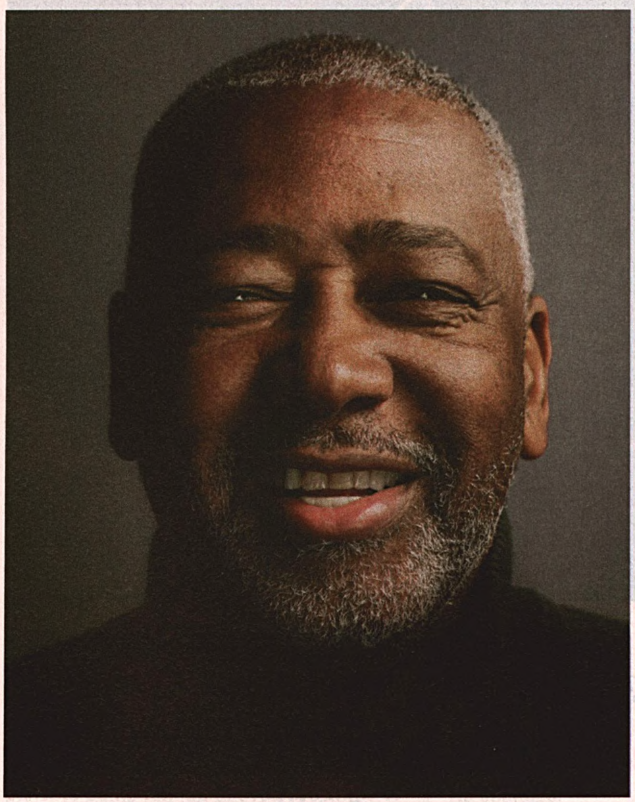
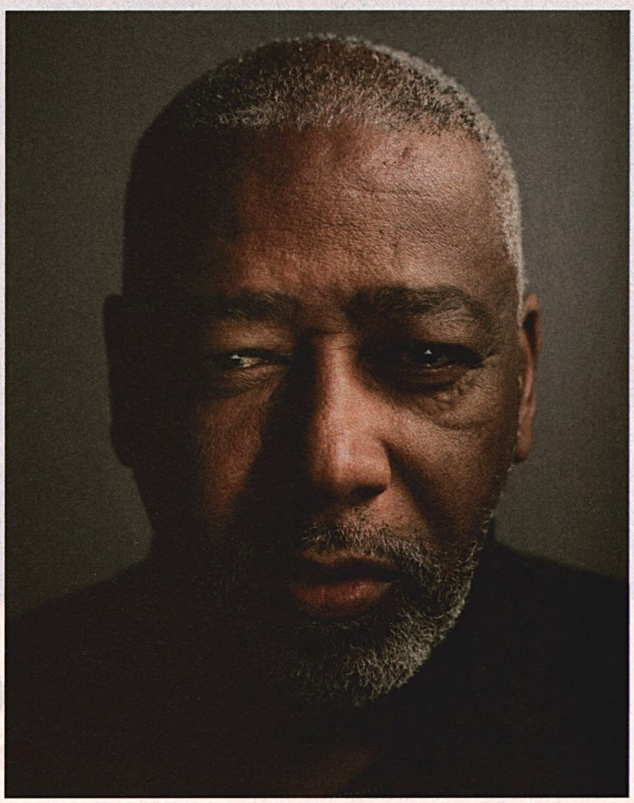




RATINGS SUMMARY

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF AUGUST 17, 2019

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

Chris Arreola (right) and Adam Kownacki, The Ring's No. 9-rated heavyweight, proved once again that boxers don't need athletic physiques to fight hard.

POUND FOR POUND

No changes.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

There was something distinctly American about the scene of Adam Kownacki vs. Chris Arreola: A melting-pot arena in Brooklyn, Polish and Mexican flags undulating in slow-motion replays like red, white and green waves of grain, and at the center of it all, two shirtless guys with a love of calories. We are in the age of Andy Ruiz Jr. and Tyson Fury, though, and flab means nothing when it comes to fighting. Kownacki and Arreola proved it, combining for an incredible 2,172 punches, according to CompuBox, with Arreola dishing out the lion's share at 1,125. This obliterated the stat-counting company's heavyweight record for overall punches (previously 1,730 for Ike Ibeabuchi vs. David Tua in 1997) and also set a new mark for total connects (667 vs. 650 for Tua-David Izon in 1996). Needless to say, the action was nonstop.

Kownacki came out fast with a long jab and big right hands while Arreola preferred to work with shorter hooks on the inside. A world title challenger on three occasions, Arreola was at an apparent disadvantage in power, with hometown favorite Kownacki seemingly immune to the Californian's punches while his own snapped the likable veteran's head back with regularity. Arreola's trainer, Joe Goossen (he of the succinct "You gotta fuckin' get inside on him now!" advice to Diego Corrales just before his sensational 10th-round stoppage of Jose Luis Castillo in 2005), again broke it down with style, telling his fighter that his only path to victory was to "out-balls" Kownacki.

Arreola gave it his absolute best, pouring on punches at a rate that would exhaust most bantamweights and also showing his ability to anticipate and deflect punches. Not enough of them, though. While not dancer-like, Kownacki's speed, strength and accuracy were impressive, and they carried him to a well-deserved unanimous decision by scores of 118-110, 117-111 and 117-111.

Kownacki held his spot at No. 9, though there was a suggestion on the ratings panel to bump him up above Joseph Parker (No. 8). The all-heart Arreola (unrated) had promised before the fight that he would retire if he lost, but said he'd make a final call after recuperating.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

No changes.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Jean Pascal's win over Marcus Browne might've been in the conversation for Upset of the Year had it not been for Andy Ruiz Jr. (not since 1990 has a fighter had such a lock on the category) – at least on paper. In the ring, it was more complicated. First, this was a very ugly fight full of collisions, grappling and aimless swings. Second, Pascal was getting his ass boxed off before things came to an end in Round 8 when Browne took a headbutt above his left eye and blood started pouring down his face into his beard. The crucial factor, though, was that Pascal connected with enough of his flailing punches (overall he landed a paltry 19 percent of them) to score three knockdowns, giving him a one-point advantage on all three cards (75-74) for a technical decision win. Regardless of the method, it was a career-rekindling victory for a guy who looked all but retired after getting outclassed by Dmitry Bivol late last year. After a long hiatus from the ratings, Pascal reentered at No. 7, which bumped out No. 10-rated Maksim Vlasov, and Browne fell from No. 5 to No. 9.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

No changes.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

No changes.

WELTERWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

As Maurice Hooker (No. 4 last month) and Jose Ramirez (No. 3) went at it on July 27 in Texas, they did so against the backdrop of some pretty dramatic numbers: Taken at the opening bell of each fight, Hooker's previous four opponents had gone in with a combined record of 100-0-1; Ramirez's last four had been 101-2. Both men had picked up a world title during those stretches, and neither had experienced a loss. With so much equal, it's no wonder the contest came down to an intense battle of wills that continued after a round-ending bell more than once. Ramirez brought the pressure, pounding his way inside Hooker's longer reach as Hooker kept his fellow American busy with stinging left hooks and hatchet rights from above. After a tremendous fifth round with toe-to-toe slugging that pushed the momentum both ways, Ramirez stunned Hooker with a left hook in Round 6 and pounced immediately, nailing his foe to the ropes with a two-fisted barrage that had the Texan out on his feet when referee Mark Nelson jumped in.

Jose Ramirez seized the moment vs. Mo Hooker.

That leaves a potential clash for the undisputed 140-pound championship against the winner of Regis Prograis vs. Josh Taylor, who will face each other on October 26, though Ramirez has said he'd like to fight again this year.

Ramirez's performance was universally praised by the ratings panel and triggered a debate about him possibly displacing Taylor (No. 2) or even Prograis (No. 1). One panelist, arguing that the California native should assume the top spot, said, "The Hooker win is the best in the division, and he also has a solid win against (Amir)

Imam. There is no case, for instance, that Regis Prograis has a better resume at this point than Ramirez does." Another countered that "Prograis' wins over Julius Indongo, Terry Flanagan and Kiryl Relikh and Taylor's victories over Ohara Davies, Ryan Martin and Ivan Baranchyk are more than a match for Ramirez's body of work" and that the WBSS final in London would rightfully decide Ramirez's rival for an all-the-marbles showdown.

A second opposition voice added: "As in the case with Andy Ruiz Jr., one huge win doesn't automatically advance a fighter to the No. 1 spot in his division (even if he beat the top dog, as Andy did). Granted, unlike Ruiz, Ramirez had already worked his way into the top 5 before scoring his big win, but I think some panel members are being prisoners of the moment. As sensational as Ramirez looked taking out Hooker once he hurt the Texan, he struggled with an unrated Jose Zepeda in his last bout. And I know from social media that more than a few panel members scored that fight for Zepeda or were happy to publicly opine that Ramirez 'got lucky' with a 'hometown decision.'"

After the healthy debate had run its course, Ramirez held his spot at No. 3. Hooker, gracious in defeat, slipped to No. 7.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Gervonta Davis (No. 2) continued to make his case for being the most explosively vicious puncher in the game, defending his WBA belt with a second-round stoppage of Ricardo Nunez (unrated) in Baltimore, but the quality of opposition wasn't nearly enough to threaten Miguel Berchelt's No. 1 standing.

IBF titleholder Tevin Farmer, wearing trunks covered with tributes to Pernell Whitaker and Maxim Dadashev (the latter's name on straps that resembled a pair of swords hanging at his hips), showed some gratuitously sweet moves of his own en route to an unchallenging unanimous decision over unrated Frenchman Guillaume Frenois (the point spread narrowed by Farmer getting a low-blow deduction in Round 10). The man from Philadelphia (rated No. 3 before and after) says he'd like to face Davis but would gladly take on Joseph Diaz Jr. (No. 6) instead. We'd be glad to see that also.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

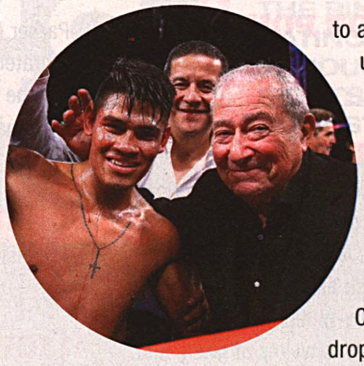
Emanuel Navarrete (No. 3) defended his WBO belt with a third-round knockout of unrated Francisco De Vaca – a fight notable for two reasons. One is that Navarrete scored a knockdown in the second round with a right uppercut-left uppercut-right hook combo, which is something you don't see every day. Also, Navarrete, who was coming off back-to-back stoppages of Isaac Dogboe, will now face Juan Miguel Elorde (28-1, 15 KOs), grandson of Filipino legend Gabriel "Flash" Elorde. Juan Miguel will be making just his second appearance in the U.S. on September 14 in Las Vegas. His first, a 2011 four-rounder against Jerry Guevara (who retired in 2015 with a record of 9-3-1), resulted in the loss on his record, and he hasn't faced any notable opponents since. Still, he's Flash's grandson.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Joshua Franco and Oscar Negrete both raised their hands triumphantly after a grueling 10 rounds in Texas on August 10, and neither was wrong – for the second time in three consecutive fights, the result was a draw. Franco held his rank at No. 10 by virtue of winning the second fight of their trilogy by split decision; Negrete remained just outside the gate.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

In a rematch of their May bout that was ultimately ruled a no-contest due to a headbutt, Jeyvier Cintron coasted to a 10-round unanimous decision over Koki Eto, 99-90 on all three cards. It was pretty easy work for the southpaw Cintron, who dropped into reverse early and invited Eto to pursue, which the game former title challenger did without hesitation.



Bob Arum is high on 122-pound beltholder Emanuel Navarrete.

Cintron tried several times for a flashy uppercut KO but mostly scored with his right hook, which he deployed effectively to the head and body, and a powerful left cross that floored the Japanese fighter in the second round (credit to Eto: The knockdown happened only 15 seconds into the round and he was able to survive) and wobbled him on other occasions. Cintron, a two-time Olympian for Puerto Rico, got into the rankings at No. 9 as a result of his win, pushing Aston Palicte off the list.

FLYWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

No changes.

STRAWWEIGHTS

Carlos Licona held his position at No. 8 with a handy unanimous decision over Nohel Arambulet (unrated), thus successfully bouncing back from a punishing 12th-round knockout loss in which he gave up his IBF title to DeeJay Kriel (No. 6).

After absorbing an accidental headbutt, Knockout CP Freshmart – aka Thammanoon Niyomtrong, aka "when the hell are you going to cross the Pacific?" – kept his WBA title and his tenuous grip on the No. 1 spot with a eight-round technical decision over unrated ArAr Andales.

RATINGS

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF AUGUST 17, 2019

No. 4-rated Naoya Inoue will face Nonito Donaire in the bantamweight final of the World Boxing Super Series on November 7 in Japan.

1 VASILIY LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

2 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

5 ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

6 ERROL SPENCE JR.
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN
Kazakhstan • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)

9 MIKEY GARCIA
U.S. • 39-1-0 (30 KOs)

10 MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)

1 TYSON FURY
U.K. • 28-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 41-0-1 (40 KOs)

3 ANDY RUIZ JR.
U.S. • 33-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)

5 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)

6 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)

7 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)

9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 MURAT GASSIEV
Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

3 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

5 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 23-1-0 (10 KOs)

6 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)

7 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

8 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN
France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

9 LAWRENCE OKOLIE
U.K. • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 YVES NGABU
Belgium • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

2 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 33-3-1 (28 KOs)

3 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

7 JEAN PASCAL
Canada • 34-6-1 (20 KOs)

8 JESSE HART
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

9 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

10 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 22-3-0 (14 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)

3 CALEB PLANT
U.S. • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 33-1-1 (24 KOs)

5 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)

8 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

9 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 AVNI YILDIRIM
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of August 17, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

1 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kaz. • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)

2 **DANIEL JACOBS**
U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)

3 **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE**
U.S. • 28-0-0 (17 KOs)

4 **JERMALL CHARLO**
U.S. • 29-0-0 (21 KOs)

5 **RYOTA MURATA**
Japan • 15-2-0 (12 KOs)

6 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

7 **DAVID LEMIEUX**
Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)

8 **KAMIL SZEREMETA**
Poland • 20-0-0 (4 KOs)

9 **MACIEJ SULECKI**
Poland • 28-2-0 (11 KOs)

10 **ROB BRANT**
U.S. • 25-2-0 (17 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)

2 **JARRETT HURD**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

3 **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba • 25-3-3 (14 KOs)

4 **JAIME MUNGUIA**
Mexico • 33-0-0 (26 KOs)

5 **BRIAN CASTANO**
Argentina • 15-0-1 (11 KOs)

6 **TONY HARRISON**
U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 **JERMELL CHARLO**
U.S. • 32-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **MICHEL SORO**
France • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)

9 **ERICKSON LUBIN**
U.S. • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)

10 **KELL BROOK**
U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)

4 **KEITH THURMAN**
U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)

5 **SHAWN PORTER**
U.S. • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)

6 **DANNY GARCIA**
U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 **YORDENIS UGAS**
Cuba • 24-4-0 (11 KOs)

8 **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS**
Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)

9 **SERGEY LIPINETS**
Russia • 16-1-0 (12 KOs)

10 **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **REGIS PROGRAIS**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (20 KOs)

2 **JOSH TAYLOR**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

3 **JOSE RAMIREZ**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)

4 **IVAN BARANCHYK**
Russia • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **VIKTOR POSTOL**
Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)

6 **KIRYL RELIKH**
Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)

7 **MAURICE HOOKER**
U.S. • 26-1-3 (17 KOs)

8 **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
Puerto Rico • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)

9 **YVES ULYSSE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)

10 **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY**
Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)

Former champ Jean Pascal punched his way back into the light heavyweight rankings with a technical decision over Marcus Browne.

Jose Ramirez held onto his No. 3 spot in the junior welterweight rankings with his WBC/WBO title-unifying stoppage of Maurice Hooker.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

1 **RICHARD COMMEY**
Ghana • 29-2-0 (26 KOs)

2 **LUKE CAMPBELL**
U.K. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)

3 **JOSE PEDRAZA**
P.R. • 26-2-0 (13 KOs)

4 **DEVIN HANEY**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

6 **ROBERT EASTER**
U.S. • 21-1-1 (14 KOs)

7 **JAVIER FORTUNA**
Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)

8 **EMMANUEL TAGOE**
Ghana • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)

9 **ANTHONY CROLLA**
U.K. • 34-7-3 (13 KOs)

10 **RYAN GARCIA**
U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
Mexico • 36-1-0 (32 KOs)

2 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)

3 **TEVIN FARMER**
U.S. • 30-4-1 (6 KOs)

4 **ANDREW CANCIO**
U.S. • 21-4-2 (16 KOs)

5 **JAMEL HERRING**
U.S. • 20-2-0 (10 KOs)

6 **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
U.S. • 29-1-0 (15 KOs)

7 **MASAYUKI ITO**
Japan • 25-2-1 (13 KOs)

8 **MIGUEL ROMAN**
Mexico • 61-13-0 (47 KOs)

9 **FRANCISCO VARGAS**
Mexico • 25-2-2 (18 KOs)

10 **RENE ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 31-8-0 (20 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **LEO SANTA CRUZ**
U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)

2 **JOSH WARRINGTON**
U.K. • 29-0-0 (6 KOs)

3 **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **OSCAR VALDEZ**
Mexico • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)

5 **CARL FRAMPTON**
U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

6 **XU CAN**
China • 17-2-0 (3 KOs)

7 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)

8 **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **KID GALAHAD**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)

10 **JOET GONZALEZ**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **DANIEL ROMAN**
U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)

2 **REY VARGAS**
Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)

3 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE**
Mexico • 28-1-0 (24 KOs)

4 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

5 **TJ DOHENY**
Australia • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)

6 **RYOSUKE IWASA**
Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)

7 **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)

8 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

9 **ISAAC DOGBOE**
Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)

10 **SHINGO WAKE**
Japan • 26-5-2 (18 KOs)

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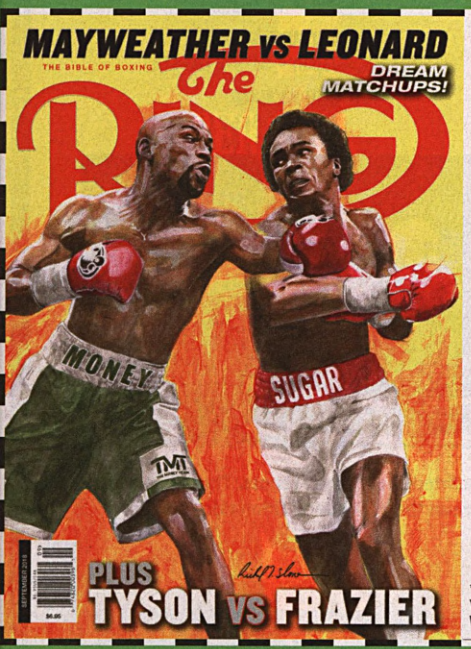

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RATINGS

Through fights of August 17, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1 LUIS NERY** Mexico • 30-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **2 ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **3 NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-5-0 (26 KOs)
- **4 NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **5 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **6 JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 19-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **8 CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 38-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **9 JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 21-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10 JOSHUA FRANCO** U.S. • 15-1-2 (7 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **1 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2 DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **3 KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **5 JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 31-1-2 (21 KOs)
- **6 ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
- **7 ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 31-4-1 (22 KOs)
- **9 JEYVIER CINTRON** P.R. • 11-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10 ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 20-2-5 (10 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5 CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 11-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **7 CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **9 RYOICHI TAGUCHI** Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)
- **10 JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1 KEN SHIRO** Japan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2 HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3 CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4 FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5 ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 ANGEL ACOSTA** P.R. • 20-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7 MILAN MELINDO** Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)
- **9 TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-9-2 (20 KOs)
- **10 SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)

Top-rated junior lightweights were in action on July 27: Gervonta Davis stopped Ricardo Nunez in two rounds...

...and Tevin Farmer outpointed Guillaume Frenois. There has been talk of a showdown between the 130-pound titleholders.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 20-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 53-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 19-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **4 BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 26-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO** S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **6 DEEJAY KRIEL** S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **7 JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **8 CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 15-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **9 SAMUEL SALVA** Phil. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10 WILFREDO MENDEZ** Puerto Rico • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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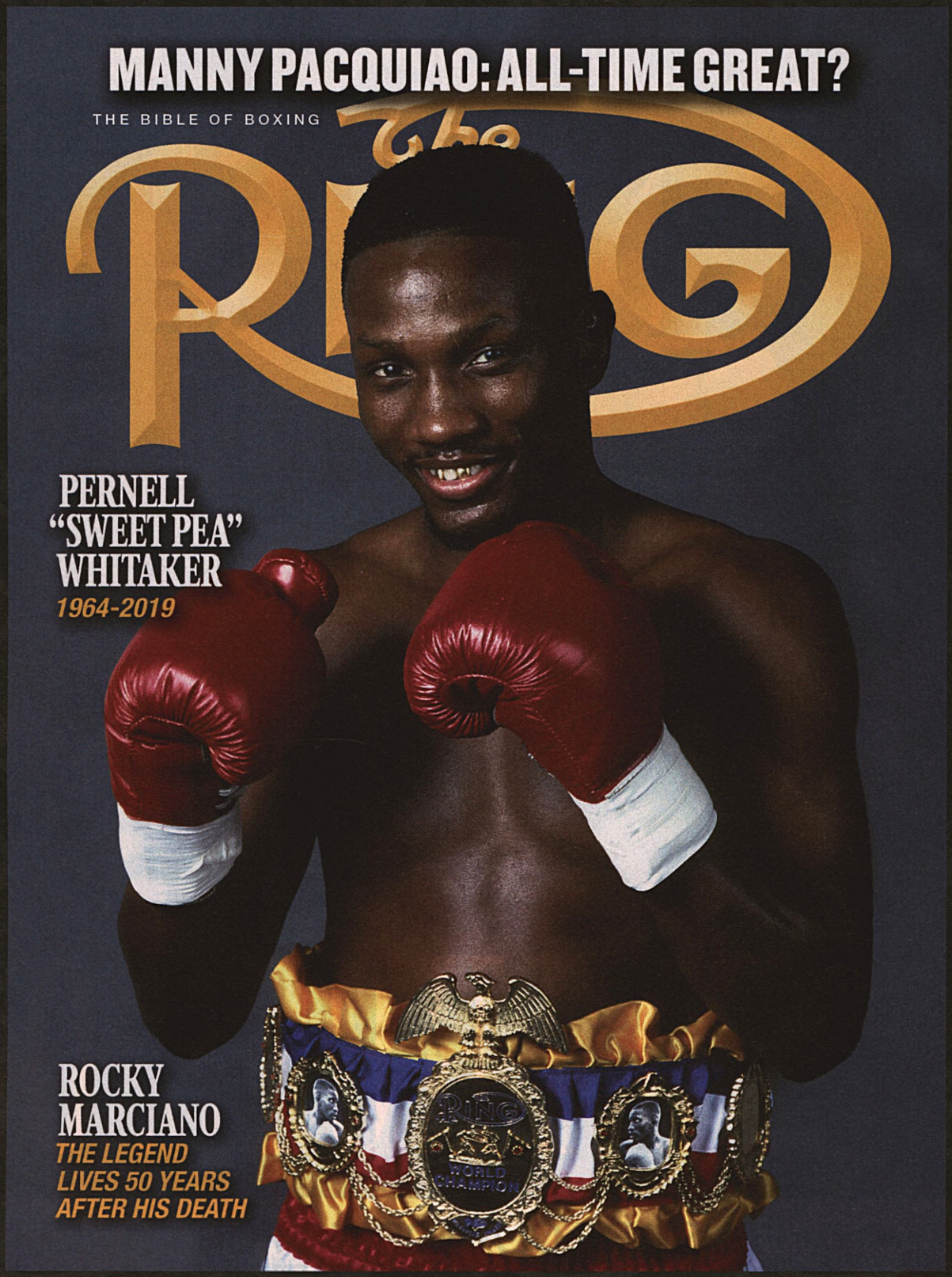

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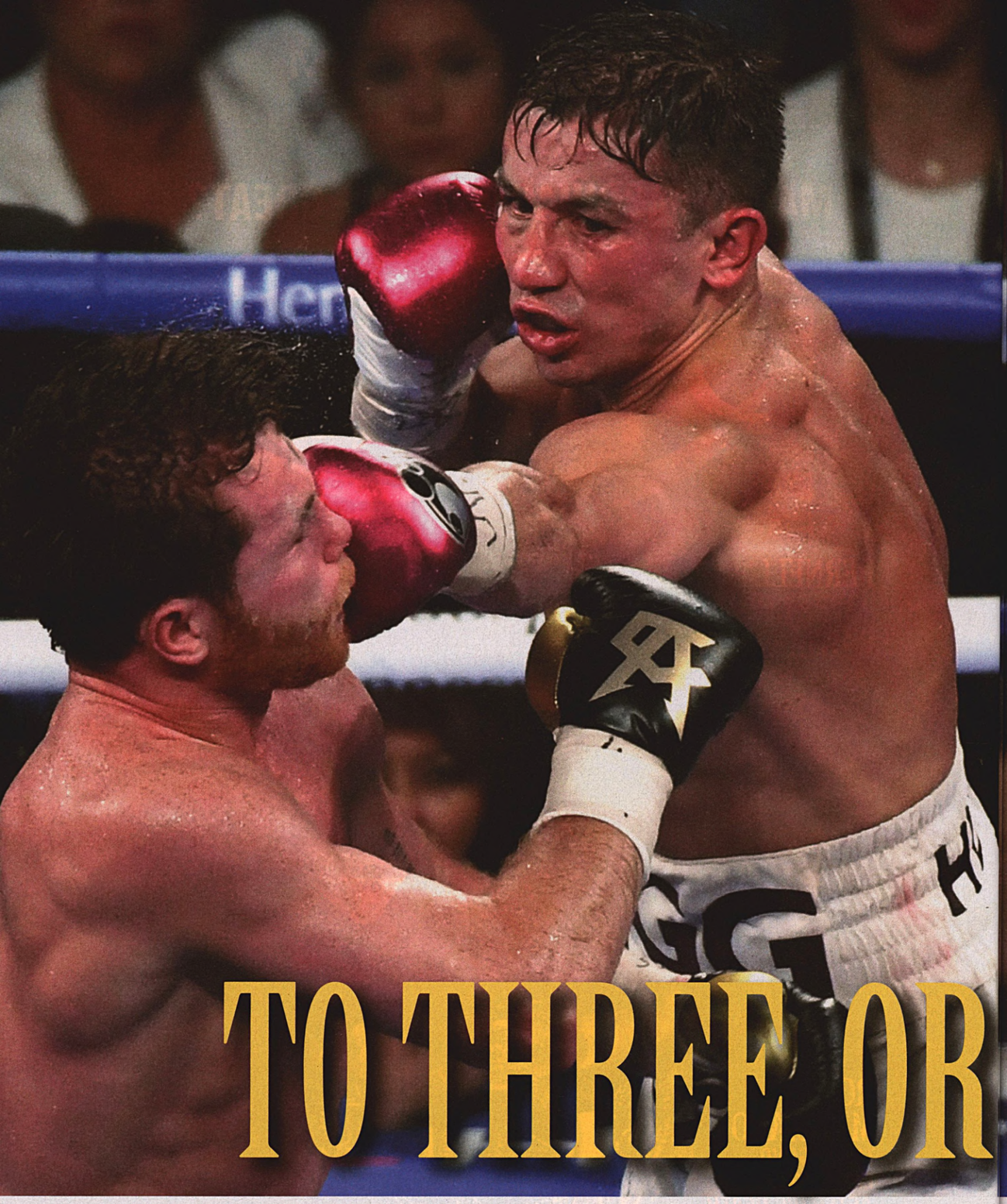
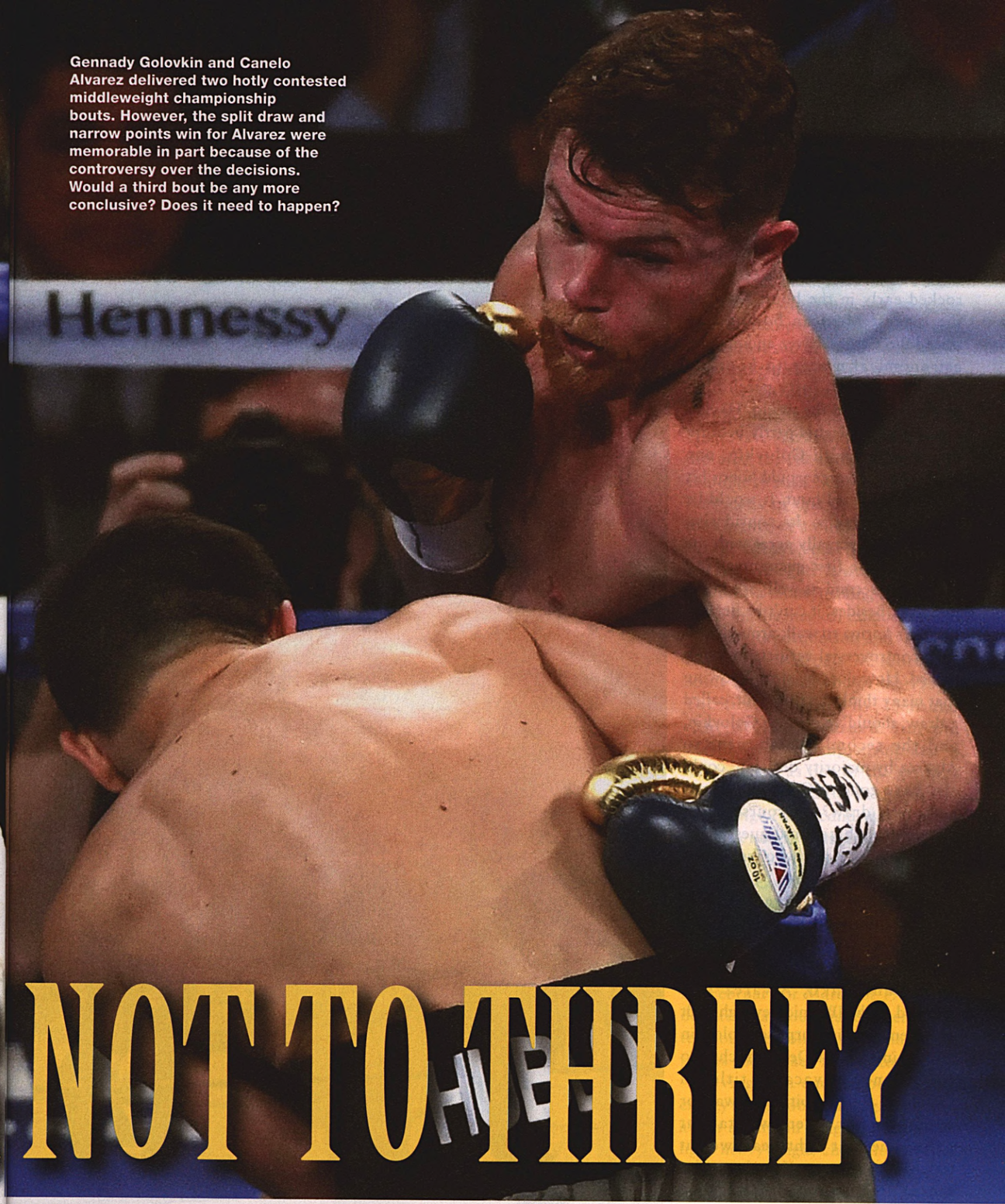




Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez delivered two hotly contested middleweight championship bouts. However, the split draw and narrow points win for Alvarez were memorable in part because of the controversy over the decisions. Would a third bout be any more conclusive? Does it need to happen?

TO THREE, OR NOT TO THREE?

FANS ARE CLAMORING FOR **CANELO-GOLOVKIN 3**, BUT HISTORY HAS SHOWN THAT SOMETIMES TWICE IS ENOUGH

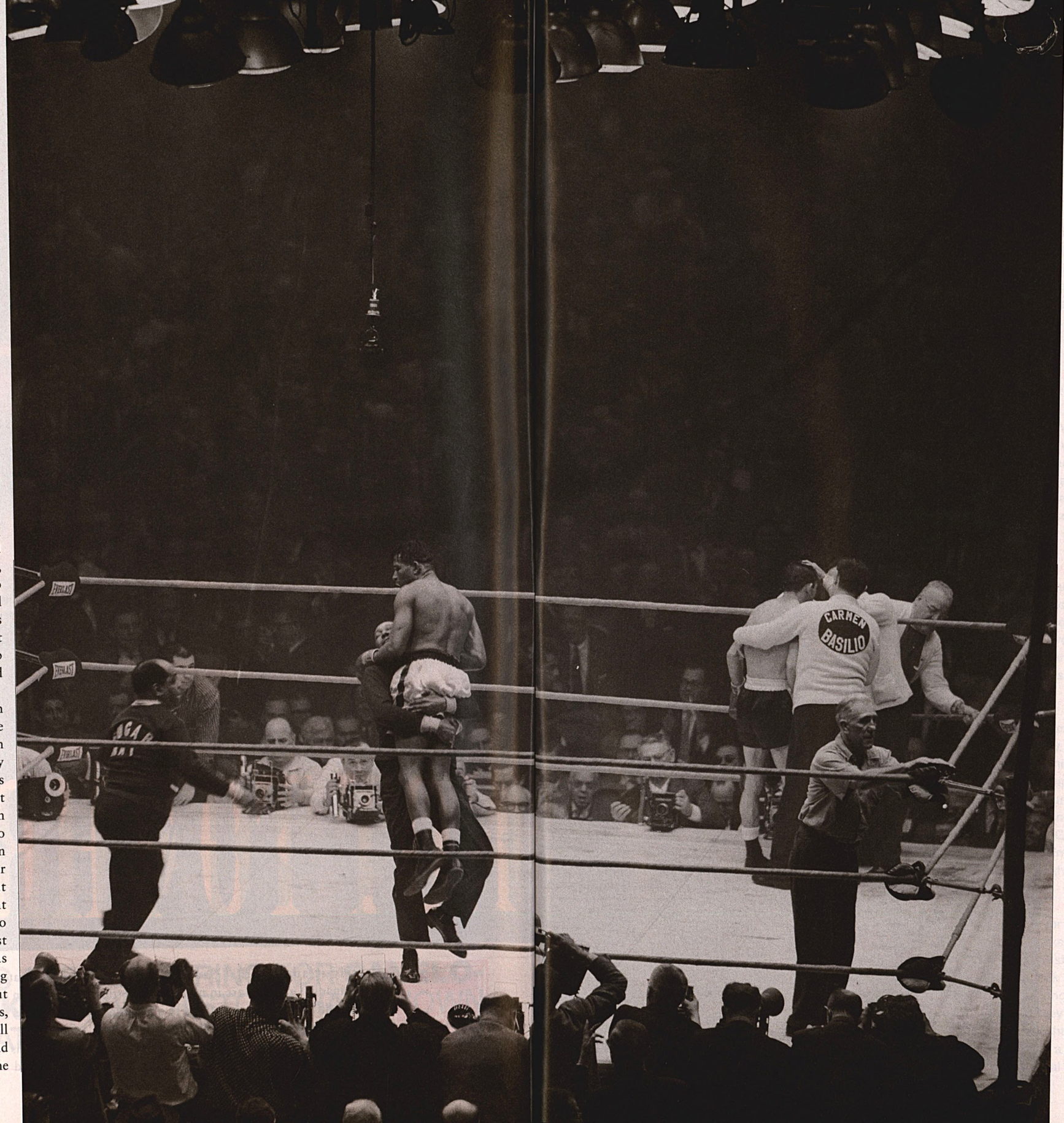
By **Don Stradley**

Lately it appears that Saul Alvarez and Gennadiy Golovkin are in no hurry to settle their differences. They gave us two very fine bouts, the second being The Ring's Fight of the Year for 2018, but at this point in time a third fight is not definite. In fact, it is closer to being categorized as a big, fat "maybe." To the frustration of many fans, the Alvarez-Golovkin rivalry has started to feel like a movie with no final act.

Since his two bouts with Golovkin, Alvarez has soared into a kind of rarified air. We never

would've projected this for him nine years ago when he appeared on the undercard of a show headlined by Floyd Mayweather Jr. versus Shane Mosley. Back then, in what was his American pay-per-view debut, Alvarez scored a ninth-round TKO over Jose Cotto but was badly rocked early in the bout. Now, as the biggest Mexican boxing star since Julio Cesar Chavez and making astronomical money to boot, he seems to be on a lofty perch high above the rest of the world. Having reached these heights partly because of his fights with Golovkin, one might think Alvarez would honor his rival with a third bout. It would be the sporty thing to do, considering the fans who actually agree with the scoring of the first encounter (and maybe the second as well) are in the minority. Besides, it can't be healthy for one's karma to walk around with such controversial verdicts on one's record. How does he sleep knowing that many think the first bout, called a draw, should've gone to Golovkin, and the second, which went to Alvarez by majority decision, could also have gone to Golovkin or was perhaps a draw? Of course, most people probably would guess sleep comes easy for a guy who just signed a $365 million contract.

Since Alvarez suffered through a recent debacle involving the IBF – when talks broke down over a possible fight with Sergiy Derevyanchenko, Alvarez was stripped of the IBF middleweight belt and then, surprise surprise, Golovkin moved in to fight Derevyanchenko for the newly vacated title on October 5 – he's a bit like a warrior without a war. There was talk at press time that light heavyweight titleholder Sergey Kovalev, who scored an 11th-round KO against Anthony Yarde on August 24, was the frontrunner for Canelo's ring return, slated for November, but according to Golden Boy Promotions, a third tango with Golovkin is still on Canelo's mind. "He's told us, and he has said many times, if that is the fight the fans and the media want, he'll do it," said company president Eric Gomez in August.



The Robinson-Basilio rivalry produced two fights of the year, but a third bout never happened.

Canelo-Golovkin 3 is among the best matchups and biggest boxing events that can be made, so naturally it is the fight that fans – and DAZN, the exclusive broadcast platform for the middleweight stars – want. However, Alvarez refuses to be dictated to. He could conceivably continue to push Golovkin away. And that leads to this question: Would the absence of a third fight be a bad thing? Might some trilogies best remain unfought? It wouldn't be the first time a moneymaking feud didn't reach for the magical number three.

Sugar Ray Robinson and Carmen Basilio split a pair of scorching bouts at the back end of the 1950s. The first, Basilio's by 15-round split decision, earned him the middleweight championship and is remembered as one of the greatest back-and-forth battles in the history of boxing. The second was another split verdict, this time won by Robinson. That both contests were razor-close, won The Ring's Fight of the Year honors (1957 and '58) and drew crowds just about guaranteed a third bout. In fact, there was serious talk of a rubber match set for February or March of 1959. But despite what your grandfather might tell you, the politics of boxing were just as tricky back then as today.

Having seen enough of Basilio's craggy face, Robinson began talking about a jump in weight class to face light heavyweight champion Archie Moore, which would've been a major attraction. Robinson frittered away the next several months and was stripped by the National Boxing Association for inactivity. Rather than fight Moore or Basilio, he ended up in Boston (he was still recognized as champion by New York, Massachusetts and The Ring),

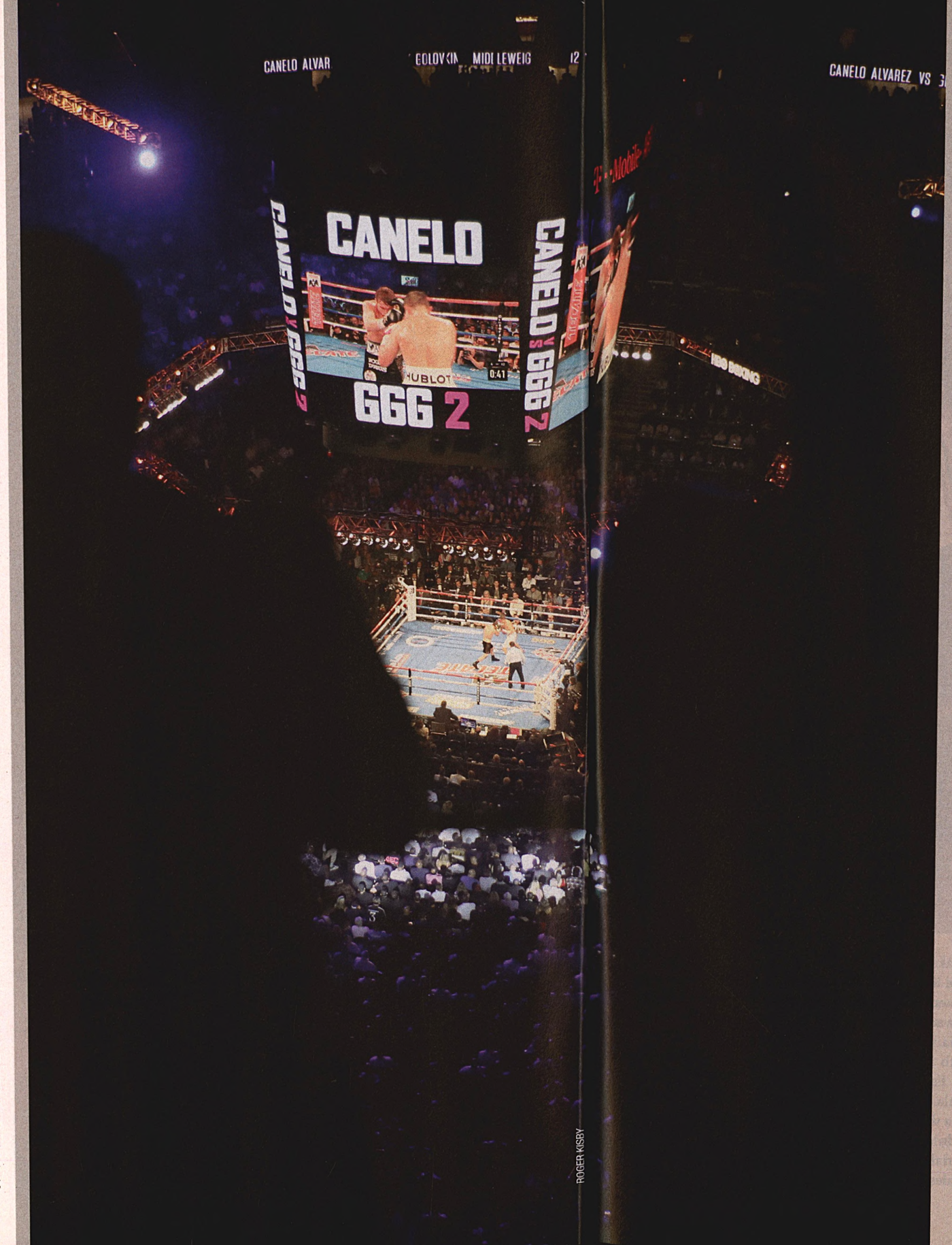
where he lost a controversial split decision to local journeyman Paul Pender. By then, Robinson was 38 and considered to be well past his prime, while Basilio, who may have left his best stuff in the ring with Robinson, lost three of his next seven bouts before retiring in 1961.

Robinson is rightfully revered now, but in the late 1950s he was viewed as a bit of a diva, a fighter who thought he was above the business and could dictate the path of his career and everyone else's. But most felt he'd made a mistake by not fighting Basilio again. Basilio later told author Peter Heller that Robinson probably regretted his decision, "because there was a lot of money involved for both of us. More for him. He'd have gotten twice as much."

Then again, Robinson may have been satisfied with the Basilio twofer. He'd regained the title and didn't have to risk another close bout that might've gone Basilio's way. Sometimes two is enough.

Jack Dempsey was probably satisfied to end his series with Gene Tunney at two bouts. Though Dempsey lost both fights on points, the second featured a moment that may have satisfied him, even if he didn't regain the heavyweight title that Tunney had taken. In that second bout, one of the key sporting events of the 1920s, Tunney was dumped to the canvas in Round 7 by a perfect storm of Dempsey punches. But with Dempsey refusing to go to a neutral corner so referee Dave Barry could begin the count, Tunney remained down for what seemed an eternity. Tunney got up and won the bout by decision, but for Dempsey's outraged fans the fight was highly scandalous. A third bout was discussed, but both fighters wanted to retire. Besides, "the long count" made Dempsey seem briefly like the tiger he'd once been, which gave his career a bittersweet ending and his admirers a thrill they never forgot.

The Evander Holyfield-Mike Tyson twofer ended with Tyson biting



ALVAREZ-GOLOVKIN 3: DO WE WANT IT? DO WE NEED IT?

Steve Farhood, Showtime: "The world will not come to an end if there is no third fight. In fact, at this point, I'd love to see some younger blood – Jermall Charlo or Demetrius Andrade vs. Canelo. There's little doubt that if there is no third fight, it will hurt Golovkin's legacy much more than that of Canelo. Canelo seems the one reluctant to do it again, but over the course of his entire career, he's always sought out the toughest and most difficult opposition, from Floyd to Austin Trout and Erislandy Lara to Golovkin. So I don't think missing a third fight with Golovkin will create a gaping hole in his resume."

Mark Kriegel, ESPN boxing analyst: "If there's a massive outcry for Canelo and Golovkin to fight again, the only guy who can hear it is apparently Golovkin. Kind of a shame. At 37, Golovkin has made Canelo his White Whale. If the first fight was a bad decision – which I think it was, but let's face it, we've seen even worse – Golovkin had a perfectly good chance to make it right. Instead, he got out-boxed. Make all the Mexican beef jokes you want, but Canelo showed me a lot in that second fight. Still, after 24 rounds, what exactly was so dramatic and compelling that the world absolutely needs to see it again?"

Kevin Mitchell, The UK Guardian: "I would like to see a third fight. Oddly, the perception is that Canelo has emerged from the first two as the undisputed winner of their rivalry. I don't agree. The first was close, and I had GGG winning. The second was tougher to score – but you could easily make it 1-1 after two. I have to say, before they fought, I thought Golovkin would edge any fight between them. Now, I'm not so sure. Age is cruel. Nevertheless, the rivalry deserves resolution, like all great rivalries do."

Dan Rafael, ESPN.com: "Like any boxing fan, of course, I would like to see Canelo-GGG 3. Definitely. That said, I have no problem with it not happening next. There's nothing wrong with a little breathing room between fights. I'd be a little disappointed if it never happens, though. If they never do fight again, I don't think it harms either guy in terms of legacy. They had two very significant and excellent fights that were both competitive. I thought GGG deserved a close win the first time and I had it a draw the second time, but even if they never fight again, both guys will go down among the best of their time."

Carlo Rotella, The New York Times: "It's better if good fighters fight each other, so I'm usually in favor of a series continuing if there's even a little something still to be worked out between the two. In this case, what has made the series interesting is the angle between Golovkin's decline from his explosive peak and Alvarez's maturing as a boxer. So the series may well be losing its parity as their respective arcs mesh less well over time, but they're still closely matched enough that it's worth finding out if that might be thrown off by some wrinkle – if Golovkin's capable of rising to a late-career masterwork or Alvarez might enter into his own physical decline."

TO THREE, OR NOT TO THREE?

Holyfield and getting disqualified. The ending was unsatisfactory, but in regards to Tyson's reputation, it was its own kind of perfect. It cemented an image he'd increasingly toyed with – that of a full-blown street psychotic – which he happily played on for the next few years. What killed the possibility of a third bout was that Tyson lost his boxing license and spent more than a year trying to convince authorities that he was emotionally fit to fight. A third bout would've been lucrative, but chances are it would've been another win for Holyfield, and three consecutive losses would've been hell on Tyson's marquee value. Instead, he left Las Vegas that fateful night in 1997 with a dark new persona that kept him marketable even as his skills diminished.

Shane Mosley scored two wins over Oscar De La Hoya, but the second ended on such a controversial note that a third fight seemed appropriate. Not only did many people disagree with the scoring that gave Mosley the second bout, but he later admitted to having accidentally used an illegal doping product while training. Neither man looked good the following year, with Mosley dropping consecutive decisions to Winky Wright, while De La Hoya struggled to beat Felix Sturm and lost by KO to Bernard Hopkins. A third De La Hoya-Mosley fight might've been entertaining, but would've been a hard sell. The bloom was well off the rose for those two.

The twofer involving bantamweight stars Johnny Tapia and Paulie Ayala, both won by Ayala, seemed destined for a third chapter. After losing the first bout on points, Tapia was certain he'd done enough to win the rematch in 2000. When the scorecards came in for Ayala again, Tapia lost his temper and was escorted out of the ring by security. Rather than fight a third time, the two fighters moved up in weight, where they were reasonably successful but never again great. Ayala retired in 2004, while Tapia fought only sporadically thanks to his stormy personal life. A third bout might've been interesting, even at a higher weight, but it just wasn't meant to be. In the end, Tapia was posthumously inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame even without a third try at Ayala.

Fans definitely lost out when a third fight between Jose Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales failed to materialize. Their first bout, won by Corrales by KO in the 10th, was The Ring's Fight of the Year for 2005 and a classic for the ages. Castillo gained some revenge in the rematch, stopping Corrales in the fourth. The fact that Castillo came into the second bout over the 135-pound limit and hadn't starved himself to make weight likely played a part in his victory. The third bout was signed, sealed and delivered, but Castillo again showed up heavy for the weigh-in – a whopping four-and-a-half pounds over the lightweight requirement. Corrales' camp thought it unwise to face such a weighty version of Castillo and pulled out of the fight. Ticket holders were screwed.

Castillo was lambasted for his unprofessionalism. "It's a disgrace," said promoter Bob Arum. There then ensued a lot of name-calling and lawsuits, but no third fight. Had there been one, provided they found a weight class Castillo could make, it would've undoubtedly been another back-alley rumble. It's not easy to pick a winner – Corrales lost his next two bouts before a motorcycle crash ended his life, while Castillo was not at his best during his future campaigns at junior welterweight and welterweight – but it is Castillo, not Corrales, who will always be remembered as the fighter who kept their third bout from happening. It's not a nice thing to have on his resume.

Two classic bouts (eight years apart) were enough for Thomas Hearns and Sugar Ray Leonard.

Thomas Hearns hoped for a third bout with Sugar Ray Leonard, and not only because of the money to be made, but because he knew how close he'd come to beating Leonard in two previous fights. He'd been ahead on points in their 1981 bout when Leonard staged a dramatic 14th-round TKO, and he seemed to be ahead in their 1989 rematch, when Leonard was awarded a gift draw by judges who were apparently distracted by something other than Hearns' fine performance. A third bout was considered, but the competing parties couldn't agree on how much money Hearns would be paid or what the weight class would be. They went their separate ways, not concerned about how their legacies would be affected. In a way, the draw verdict of bout number two served them well. Leonard escaped without a loss and never again had to worry about fighting the formidable Hearns. As for Hearns, the draw meant, for one night at least, that he was on par with Leonard. He was no doubt pleased in recent years when Leonard said publicly that Hearns got the better of their second fight, despite the scoring.

Third fights aren't guaranteed, no matter the participants. The boxing business grinds on. If Golovkin and Canelo can make more money together than with other opponents, we'll see a third fight. But with Golovkin getting older and Canelo getting better, a third bout might not live up to expectations. That's how it goes in the fight biz. When Leonard didn't fight Hearns a third time, he opted for a rubber match with his old nemesis, Roberto Duran. Leonard won a 12-round decision that was not only dull as mud and instantly forgettable, but a perfect example of how sometimes two is better than three.

FOCUS ON SPORT

DON'T GET ROWDY, WE'RE GOING TO SAUDI

STAGING THE **ANDY RUIZ JR.-ANTHONY JOSHUA** REMATCH IN SAUDI ARABIA IS TROUBLESOME FOR MANY REASONS, BUT HOPEFULLY SOME GOOD CAN COME OF IT

By **Tom Gray**

"Under the auspices of President Mobutu, from the heartland of Africa, live and direct from ringside in Kinshasa, Zaire, this is David Frost welcoming you to the world heavyweight championship fight between the champion, George Foreman, and the former champion, now the challenger, Muhammad Ali."

This is how the original broadcast of the Foreman-Ali bout was introduced to closed-circuit audiences on October 30, 1974. Roughly 450 locations transmitted the event live in the U.S. and Canada. Over 100 countries picked up the rights to view what was then the richest prizefight ever. An estimated 60,000 fans were packed inside the 20th May stadium to witness Ali's spectacular eighth-round knockout of Foreman in the most famous showdown in boxing history.

IAN WALTON - PA IMAGES

Eddie Hearn and Omar Khalil of Skill Challenge Entertainment, which helped bring the Ruiz-Joshua rematch to Saudi Arabia, announced the controversial December 7 event at The Savoy Hotel in London.

That's how "The Rumble in the Jungle" will always be remembered. An almost mystical duel between titans that re-crowned the most famous athlete the world has ever known. In many ways, it was the triumph that made Ali. He was already a great fighter, but the Foreman victory transformed him into an all-conquering hero for millions of people the world over. Isn't it therefore ironic that Ali's most glorious moment took place amid a backdrop of horrific human rights issues and oppression?

"When we covered 'The Rumble in the Jungle,' Mobutu Sese Seko was one of the worst tyrants in the world," recalled U.K. boxing correspondent Colin Hart. "You talk about human rights, there was absolutely nothing in Zaire. It was a vicious dictatorship. What I will say is, (the international press) continued to write about these things and, to be fair, we were never censored.

"The difference between then and now is that the term 'human rights' wasn't thrown around as much. However, Mobuto's record (of dictatorship) was well-covered by people who were there for the fight. I remember (the press) were taken into the bowels of the stadium, and one wall was covered with bullet holes. That was where they used to take the dissidents and shoot them, and I reported that.

"We sent our copy via telex in those days, and the telex operators over there were useless. Some of them would even sleep on duty. We complained to the press chief, and it went all the way up to Mobutu, who issued an edict saying, 'The next telex operator found sleeping on duty will be shot.' And he bloody meant it. It was the most bizarre event I ever covered."

Fast-forward 45 years to December 7, 2019. On that date, Anthony Joshua will take on Andy Ruiz Jr. in a specially constructed outdoor arena in Diriyah, Saudi Arabia. In what will surely go down

Muhammad Ali strolls with Congolese dictator Joseph Mobutu two days before upsetting George Foreman.

as the upset of the year, Joshua lost a trio of heavyweight title belts to Ruiz, who stopped him in seven rounds on June 1 at Madison Square Garden. The return fight is massive, but when the location of fight two was announced, the news was met largely with disappointment and disgust.

The reasons for that are understandable.

Saudi Arabia has a record of deplorable human rights violations. On record are brutal executions, amputations of hands and feet for those who commit robbery, and women have reportedly been lashed for committing adultery because they couldn't prove they'd been victims of rape. Incidentally, lashings can go on for a period of weeks or even months. When the United Nations attempted to intervene in 2004, their protests were rejected by the Saudi Arabia delegation, who insisted that this form of punishment was in line with "legal traditions" of Islam dating back 1,400 years.

In order to make Ruiz-Joshua 2 a reality, Matchroom Boxing promoter Eddie Hearn entered into a partnership with Skill Challenge Entertainment in Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia has been very focused on enhancing the life quality of

people and their overall health and well-being," said Managing Partner of SCE Omar Khalil at a London press conference announcing the bout. "Sports, art, culture and entertainment have been playing a major role in this." All well and good, but with the European Saudi Organization for Human Rights having released a report in July highlighting that 122 people have been executed in 2019 (over double the amount from 2018 at the same point of the year), people are going to have a hard time swallowing positive PR rhetoric.

"The human rights in Saudi Arabia are among the worst in the world, but if they're not given a chance, then how are they going to change?" asked Hart. "If they're going to change, then they're going to need more and more people going back and forth from the west. People who conduct their lives the way we do – democratically. And while we're not perfect, human rights is high up on our agenda.

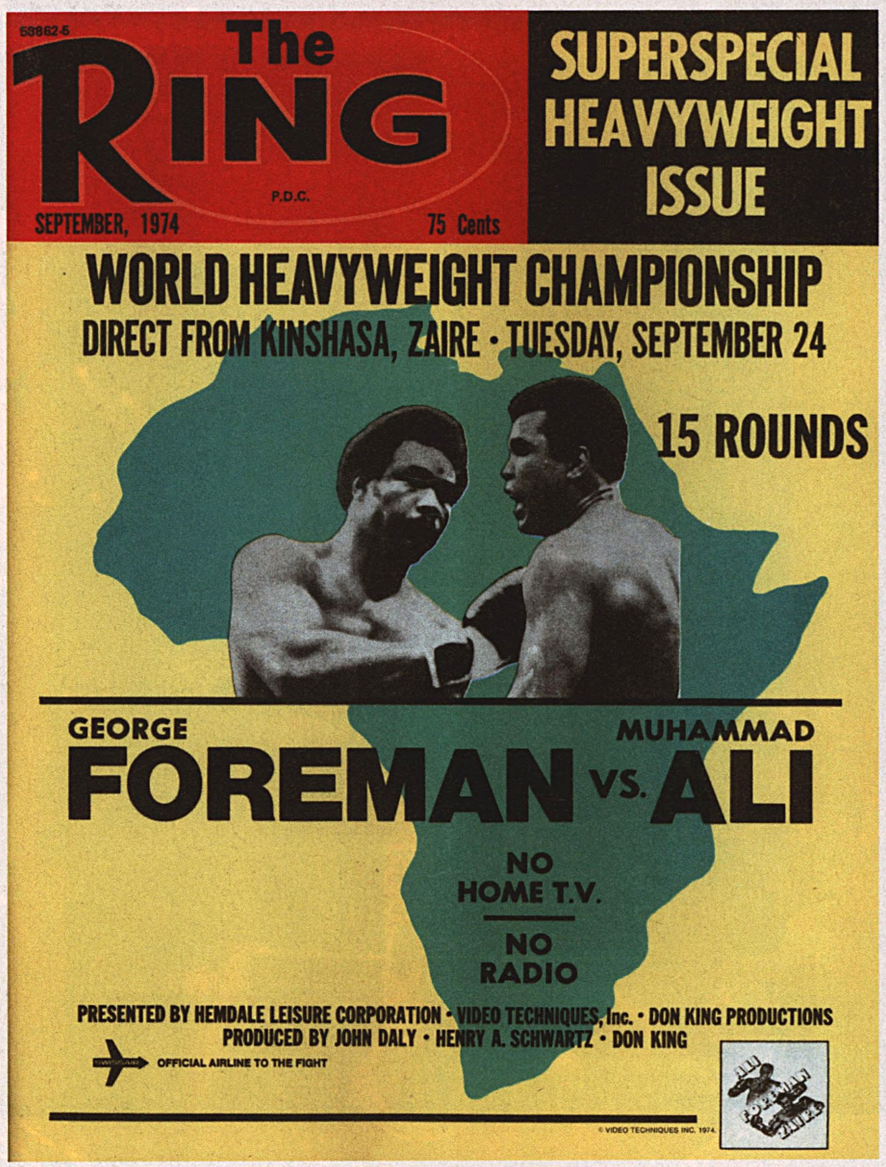
"If you keep isolating Saudi Arabia, then they will never change. I wasn't at Callum Smith-George Groves or Amir Khan-Billy Dib (both bouts took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, within the last year), but I watched on television. What surprised me was the number of women I saw in the audience – not westerners – without their heads covered and wearing fashionable western dress. But that doesn't mean they've got the same rights as men when they leave the arena."

Women's rights in particular have been a source of criticism aimed at Saudi Arabia in recent years as many examples of government-sanctioned male dominance – everything from requiring permission from a man to drive (this law was only lifted in 2018) to legal domestic violence – have become known.

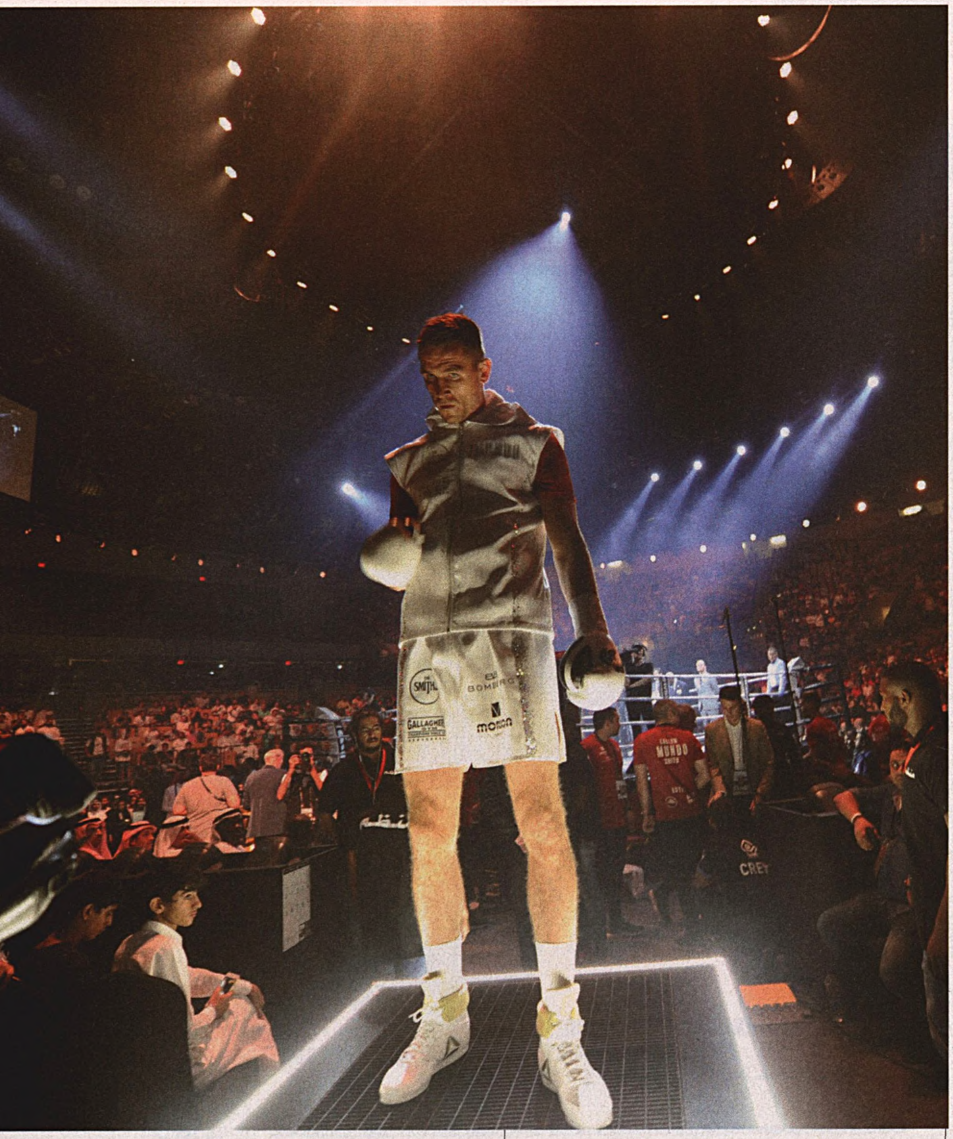
And then there is a more far-reaching sinister side. On October 2, less than a week after the Groves-Smith bout, Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to collect some documents while his fiancée waited for him outside. She never saw him again. The 59-year-old Khashoggi was a well-known critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and had lived in self-imposed exile in the U.S. after a number of his friends were arrested. Reports soon emerged that he'd been murdered by Saudi assassins in the consulate garden.

I was one of very few U.K. writers to attend Groves-Smith, which was the super middleweight final of the World Boxing Super Series. I'm the first to admit that my overall knowledge on Saudi Arabia was limited at that time, but I found the above stories and statistics uncomfortable. Equally disconcerting is the fact that the country is now being promoted as an entertainment capital. There's a lot of change required before that transition can be deemed anywhere near acceptable.

In the same way that the government of Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo) attempted to showcase their country as an attractive holiday destination with Foreman-Ali, Saudi Arabia seeks to attract the western world by putting on one of the most



The location of the "Rumble in the Jungle" was controversial, but boxing never let that get in the way of money.



Callum Smith traveled to Jeddah to win the Ring super middleweight title by stopping George Groves in the WBSS final.

lucrative heavyweight title fights available. The country was able to secure Ruiz-Joshua 2 because – like the Zaire of 1974 – they had the financial muscle to outbid everyone else that was interested in staging the fight. The approximate figure that reportedly sealed the deal was $100 million, which defeated the closest losing bid from Dubai with room to spare.

Shifting the controversy to one side – no easy task – the Ruiz-Joshua rematch will take place in Saudi Arabia and that's the end of it. Professional prizefighting and the moral compass rarely go hand-in-hand, so let's not act too surprised by what's transpired here. For the sake of variety, let's examine what good can come out of it. Without exaggeration, no fighter alive has engaged in more heavyweight championship fights in unusual locales than George Foreman. The former two-time champion vividly recalls those sun-splashed battles from his first title reign and spoke glowingly about fighting on foreign soil. "I think that was the beginning of what's happening today," Foreman told The Ring. "In the 70s, fights were worldwide events, so the whole world had something to say. If anything, more people spoke about the fights because they were outside the United States. It was Jamaica (for Joe Frazier), then it was Japan (for Jose Roman), then it was Caracas, Venezuela (for Ken Norton), then it was Africa.

"The media focused on the fights being in different parts of the world, and that's good for boxing. Look at the great fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier in Manila. That was something, and everybody in the Philippines had the chance to say those great names. When Ali fought (Joe) Bugner in Malaysia; that fight comes to mind because of where it took place. Now the heavyweight championship of the world is back on a worldwide stage with (the Ruiz-Joshua) fight."

Foreman suggested that the rematch taking place in Saudi Arabia could conceivably raise awareness of human rights issues and, in the long run, that could help eradicate brutality and oppression within the country. The Hall of Famer's outlook makes a lot of sense, and time will tell if such expectations are realistic.

In terms of the bout itself, Ruiz-Joshua 2, whether it's a good fight or a bad fight, will always be remembered for where it took place. With that said, the first encounter was action-packed, and there's every possibility that the sequel will produce the type of fireworks seen in past heavyweight title fights that took place in unusual territory. Think "Thrilla in Manila." Think Mike Tyson's capitulation at the hands of Buster Douglas in Tokyo. Think Lennox Lewis succumbing to Hasim Rahman's volcanic right-hand shot in South Africa.

"Boxing in different countries is wonderful because, remember, the announcer always says, 'Ladies and gentlemen... the heavyweight champion of the world...'" bellowed Foreman in his finest Michael Buffer voice. "It's important that these events happen in different countries so that people don't think that everything revolves around Las Vegas.

"This is an excellent opportunity

STEVE MARCUS

Andy Ruiz Jr. initially balked at traveling to Saudi Arabia, but his destiny awaits in Diriyah.

for Ruiz to be recognized as the heavyweight champion of the world. He'll be fighting outside of the United States. The people won't just look at him as an American or a Mexican-American; he'll be recognized worldwide. And once that bell rings and you're in that little square, you could be on Mars. You're really not aware of where you are. A boxing ring is a boxing ring, and you don't have time to care about what country you're in. I can tell you that from experience."

Ruiz-Joshua 2 will one day be confined to fistic history, and how the fight is viewed after the punches have been thrown remains to be seen. Saudi Arabia is not the first controversial host country, and it won't be the last. The 2008 Olympics in Beijing were tainted by a kaleidoscope of human rights issues, news censorship and controversy surrounding the Chinese capital's active conflicts. The 2014 winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, took place under a cloud of corruption, doping and homophobic legislation.

All we can hope for is change where it matters most. RING

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for The Ring. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

Andy Ruiz Jr. celebrates in the moment of his monumental heavyweight championship upset on June 1. That celebration lasted three months, causing many to ask if the affable underdog will be a one-hit wonder.

AGAINST THE ODDS

WITH **ANDY RUIZ JR.'S** TRIUMPH OVER **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IN MIND, TWO FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT UNDERDOGS REFLECT ON THE NIGHTS THEY PROVED EVERYONE WRONG

By **Brin-Jonathan Butler**

On December 31, 1989, 42 days before he fought Mike Tyson 6,500 miles away at the Tokyo Dome in Japan as a 42-to-1 underdog, 29-year-old James "Buster" Douglas attended a New Year's Eve party in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio. Through the crowd of people he noticed a beautiful woman across the room staring at him. Douglas approached her to introduce himself. As he neared, the woman began shaking her head.

"Hi," Douglas said, confused why she continued to shake her head.

"You must be really desperate," she laughed, glaring at him.

"*What?*" Douglas replied incredulously.

"I said you must be awfully desperate. You have to be awfully desperate for some money to fight someone like Mike Tyson."

Douglas laughed recalling the story over the phone.

"*That* was the hold Tyson had over everyone. And that's how everyone saw me."

"I wonder what she thought of you 42 days later, after you knocked Tyson out," I teased.

"Well," Douglas considered, "she had a surprise coming her way."

And so did the rest of the world.

Nearly three decades after arguably the biggest upset in sports history, on June 1, 2019, Andy Ruiz Jr., age 29, scored his own knockout upset against the hugely favored, undefeated heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua in the seventh round at Madison Square Garden. Like Douglas before him, Ruiz got off the canvas to do it.

Buster Douglas was watching the fight live at his brother's home and delighted in people finding the parallels between Ruiz's victory against Joshua and his own against Tyson.

"Just like me," Douglas began, pausing to savor the moment, "nobody gave Andy a chance. And then when they got in that ring and were standing together, who watching really thought this was going to be much of a fight? But just like me, Andy went out there and surprised them. And, to tell you the truth, I think he's going to do it again in the rematch. Andy stood in front of him. He never ran. He stood right there, and Joshua couldn't find him. Even when he did with that hook in the third round, we saw how Andy took it. He stood up and finished his mission."

I remind Douglas how famously well he took a vicious Tyson uppercut in the last 10 seconds of the eighth round in Japan. At the count of three, out of frustration, Douglas slammed his fist against the canvas before rising to his feet at the count of nine to escape the round.

"I watched real carefully when Ruiz went down from that hook," Douglas said. "If you noticed, Ruiz never took his eyes off him. He got up. He knew he'd made a mistake. He'd left himself vulnerable. But he maintained his focus and kept his composure. He didn't get excited. He got up and he got right back on top of Joshua, and soon enough he got rid of him. It was just beautiful to see."

And almost immediately, everyone started comparing Douglas' victory against Tyson.

"I didn't mind that at all," Douglas laughed. "It was pretty cool. What I did was part of history. Ruiz's victory is too."

I put to Douglas the hypothetical of him being in Ruiz's corner for the rematch. Douglas received enormous criticism for infamously gaining 15 pounds in the eight heady, Don King lawsuit-filled, chaotic months between his victory over Tyson and his first defense of the heavyweight title against Evander Holyfield at The Mirage in Las Vegas. (Douglas had sued King in Nevada, claiming the promoter's attempts to have the result of his victory overturned because of an alleged "long count" in Round 8 represented a breach of contract, which resulted in a drawn-out legal battle over who would promote Douglas' next fights.) I ask Douglas what pointers he might offer based on his own experience weathering the intense glare of the spotlight and scrutiny of the media.

"Winning the title was the opposite of what I thought it would be, because of Don King," Douglas explained. "It was relentless. I had three law firms in three different parts of the country that I was flying out to give depositions for. I won one of the biggest fights in history to become

heavyweight champion, and then I was in court fighting nearly as hard the next six months to even be considered heavyweight champion. Everywhere I went, somebody was handing me a piece of paper which I thought was for an autograph that ended up being a subpoena.

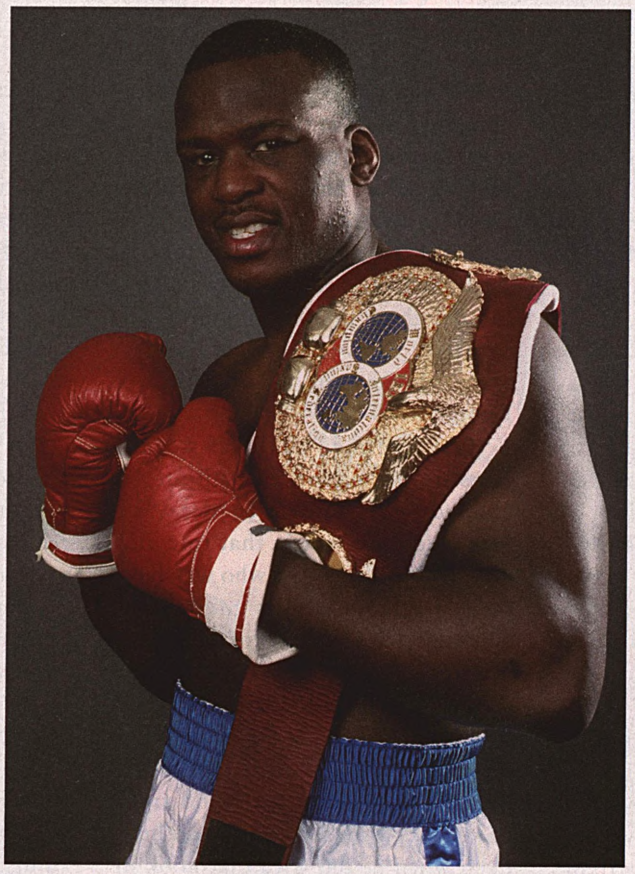
"I was left alone (when I was training) for Tyson. Coming around to defend my title against Holyfield, it was one distraction after another, Don King fighting me in court non-stop. By the time all that court stuff had finished up, I was in complete disarray and never had time to properly prepare for anything. I felt really unfairly and unjustly dealt with by the whole situation. I never had a moment's peace to gather myself and prepare for Evander Holyfield. It was six months of hell after I won and one of the worst experiences of my life.

"With Ruiz's rematch against Joshua ... nobody is denying he's the heavyweight champion. Not many people knew who Ruiz was when he fought Joshua. But Ruiz was a helluva fighter and a great amateur. It may have been a bigger stage, but it all comes down to being a fighter. Ruiz was always a fighter. Who cares if nobody else knew that but him? Joshua found out. And this time when Ruiz goes out there, it's an exciting time for him. He's walking into the ring as champion of the world. It'll be even more exhilarating for him stepping in there to defend his title. He can show the world he deserves to be there. He might not look the part or have as nice a body as Joshua when they stand in that ring, but he earned that title legitimately. A lot of people and critics were looking at his waistline instead of his resume.

"Everybody got eyes on him now, but I think Ruiz is gonna be fine. I think he's gonna be around for a while."

I ask Douglas if there's a better feeling in the world than risking everything for a dream only he could see and believed in.

"No matter what else anybody believes or thinks, that you know you had it in you to do what you did and nobody gave you a chance? When you rise above them all and succeed to snatch that golden prize, it's the ultimate. It offers some peace of mind to what happened to me after and how my career ended. I would have loved to have gone further with what I achieved against Tyson, but I still did something that nobody thought could be done. That's still a great feeling all these years later."



James Douglas claims that legal battles were a distraction leading into the first defense of his heavyweight titles.

On October 29, 1993, three-and-a-half years after Buster Douglas shocked the world against Tyson, WBO heavyweight titleholder Tommy "The Duke" Morrison had what was viewed as a tune-up fight against 29-year-old Michael Bentt on his way to earning $8 million against Lennox Lewis. Despite being one of the most decorated American amateur boxers ever and a five-time national champion, Bentt was largely dismissed as a professional "bust" after losing his debut fight against Jerry Jones in Atlantic City back in 1989. Returning after a 20-month hiatus to win his next 10 fights in a row convinced few of his critics he stood any chance against Morrison; he was less an underdog going into the fight than a walk-over.

After the opening bell, Morrison came out fast, looking to end the fight early, and nearly did after clipping Bentt's jaw with two devastating left hooks. Only 45 seconds into the round, Morrison bulldozed Bentt against the ropes and opened up to finish off his dazed challenger. Instead, Bentt fired back and dropped Morrison. When Morrison rose to beat the count, Bentt pounced on the vulnerable champion and almost immediately battered Morrison to the canvas again. Morrison gamely gathered himself once more as Bentt was poised to take advantage of the three-knockdown rule and unload everything he had on Morrison. At 1:33 of the first round, Morrison finally fell from the last of Bentt's flurry of blows. The referee waved the fight over and declared Bentt the new WBO heavyweight titleholder.

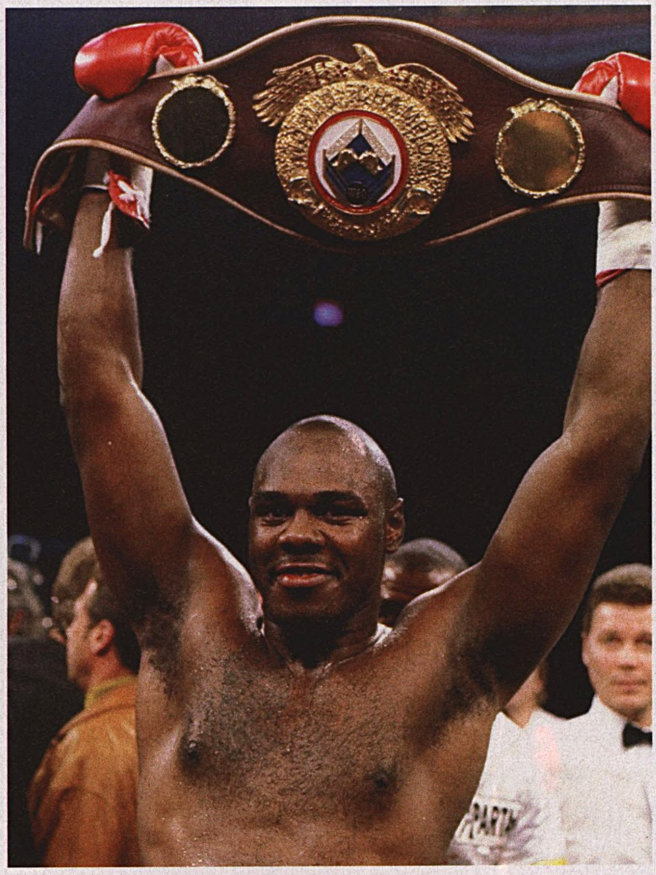
Bentt's upset victory against Morrison and the brain injuries he suffered while failing to defend the title five months later against Herbie Hide in London were the

focus of the first episode of the acclaimed Netflix series *Losers*. I was a consultant for the series and conducted the on-camera interviews with Bentt for the episode. I've never met anyone who cheers harder for underdogs than Michael Bentt, so it wasn't difficult to imagine who he was rooting for watching Ruiz enter the ring against Joshua.

"I was so thrilled for Andy Ruiz watching that night," Bentt says over the phone from his home in Atlanta, Georgia. "It was just watching everyone disrespecting him for how he looked. I'd gotten wind of him three or four years ago while I was doing some acting work in L.A. Maybe Ruiz doesn't look the part of a champion, but in terms of having the goods as a fighter? When they announced this fight was happening with Joshua, I told anyone who would listen Joshua was going to lose. Ask anybody in my circle. Not blowing any smoke. And this is no disrespect to Joshua. But I've been around the game long enough to spot who's real and who isn't. Joshua might win every bodybuilding competition against Ruiz, but I don't think he's going to win too many fights. I didn't see the hunger in Joshua's eyes that night. He gets full credit for what he did against Klitschko. But the hype that came after that – the hype overshadowed his hunger. Know what I mean?"

"Did you know that you and Ruiz and Buster Douglas were all the same age when you won the heavyweight championship?" I asked Bentt.

"No shit!" Bentt roars with laughter. "I love it. Look, I knew I could fight. Buster knew he could fight. And Andy knew he could fight. None of us needed the critics to tell us our chances against the favorite. They all gave us our chance as a payday, nothing more. Just a fight for a name guy to walk over us. Douglas was a stepping stone to Holyfield for Tyson. Ruiz was a stepping stone to Fury or Wilder for Joshua. I was the stepping stone for Morrison before Lewis and an $8 million payday just for showing up. The experts aren't in the ring. Most of them have never been in the ring. There are no experts in boxing. No one knows until it happens. That's the magic of our game. George Foreman *buried* me publicly before I knocked out Morrison. It didn't matter I was a five-time national champion as an amateur. He predicted I'd get blown out. I couldn't believe he gave my qualifications as a man fighting for the title no respect. But he found out just like everybody else did that night."



Michael Bentt says it's much harder to defend a title than it is to win it.

I asked Bentt for his prediction in the rematch between Ruiz and Joshua.

"It's harder to defend the title than it is to win it," Bentt sighs. "It's a lot harder to maintain focus in the mindfuck of that atmosphere after you shock the world. It's hard to trust anyone after everyone doubted you. But I love Ruiz coming into the rematch. I've been watching Joshua in the media looking for platforms to talk about various things to reach the public. That isn't what he should be doing after suffering that loss. He should be focused on *one* thing: preparing for Ruiz. I don't see him doing that.

"Here's how I see Joshua. In acting, after Marlon Brando showed up, *anyone* who came after that was imitating him and had some talent was held up to be the next Brando. Boxing has a lineage of great champions from Jack Johnson down the line through Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Muhammad Ali. After Joshua did what he did against Klitschko, a lot of people seemed to think the baton had been passed to our generation's great champion. But there were a lot of talented actors who came after Brando – Burt Reynolds, Sean Penn, Mickey Rourke, Benicio Del Toro – but none of them became Brando. There's nothing wrong with those guys ending up who they were. But they were built up a little bit to be somebody they could never be. Joshua was being held up a little bit to boxing's Brando. He always looked a lot more like Burt Reynolds to me. And Ruiz brought that into focus. I think he'll do even better in the rematch." RING

GREATEST HITS: JAMES TONEY

JAMES TONEY RECALLS SIX 'LIGHTS OUT' PERFORMANCES DURING A LEGENDARY CAREER THAT SPANNED TWO DECADES AND FIVE WEIGHT CLASSES

By **Doug Fischer**

Toney boasted throwback skills and attitude that enabled him to get the better of top middleweights, super middleweights, cruiserweights and heavyweights.

James Toney was both a throwback fighter and one of the faces of a brash new era in the sport.

Although Toney was part of the next wave of boxing stars that defined the 1990s along with Riddick Bowe, Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad, Terry Norris, Shane Mosley and his hated rival, Roy Jones Jr., his boxing mentality was decidedly old school.

Toney would fight anyone, anywhere, anytime. He's proud of the quality of his opposition, especially early in his pro career, which began in October 1988 and was kicked into high gear when, as a 20-to-1 underdog, he got a shot at IBF middleweight titleholder Michael Nunn in May 1991 and beat the pound-for-pound-rated southpaw with a dramatic come-from-behind 11th-round stoppage.

"I always wanted to fight the best, and I never avoided anyone in my whole career," Toney told The Ring during a one-on-one interview in August at Buddy McGirt's Gym in Northridge, California.

"I fought Michael Nunn and Mike McCallum in the same year," continued the Michigan native, who earned The Ring's 1991 Fighter of the Year award on the strength of those two performances (the McCallum fight ended in a split draw). "After I beat Nunn, I fought Reggie Johnson – the No. 1 contender – the next month. Who does that?"

Toney, who turned 51 on August 24, is also proud of having been a fighting champion.

"In 1992, I fought three title fights – including my second fight with McCallum – and two non-title fights," said Toney, who fought 12 times in 1989, his first full year as a pro, and 10 times in 1990.

"In 1993, I fought two title fights – including Iran Barkley, who had belts at light heavyweight and super middleweight – and five non-title bouts. In 1994, I fought three title fights – including 'Prince' Charles Williams, the (IBF) light heavyweight champ, and Roy Jones – and two non-title bouts."

His first championship run, which combined IBF middleweight and super middleweight reigns, ended with his unanimous-decision loss to Jones. It would be almost nine years before he fought for another major world title, but it was a wild ride that thrilled fans and fascinated sportswriters.

A big part of Toney's appeal and media interest was his hot temper. The product of a broken home and rough upbringing in Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor, it never took much for Toney's inner rage to explode into his surroundings when he felt disrespected. His volatile nature made him a polarizing figure in boxing, but his outbursts and antics – which included verbal abuse and sometimes physical attacks on his opponents at press conferences and weigh-ins – went hand-in-hand with the often vulgar and violent "gangsta rap," which he was quite fond of and was

very popular during his peak years.

Like that vitriolic brand of hip-hop, Toney enjoyed crossover success for a number of years but had pretty much run his course by the end of the decade. Most fans believed he had burned out on the sport following a loss to unheralded light heavyweight Drake Thazdi in 1997. And they were right. Toney retired for one year (1998) and gained 100 pounds during his time away from the ring.

However, while his persona may have mirrored gangsta rap, his boxing craft, which was taught and developed by jazz aficionado Bill Miller, was pure Bebop. And that brilliant blend of offense and defense enabled Toney to make an improbable comeback in his 30s. His extended encore – which included a cruiserweight world title, The Ring's 2003 Fighter of the Year award and legitimate heavyweight contender status – was guided by Freddie Roach and co-manager John Arthur, but Toney's ability to mix it up with much bigger men was mainly due to a boxing foundation that was built by the old sage from Detroit.

"Everybody knows about Emanuel Steward, and most think he was the main trainer at Kronk Gym, but Manny had help," Toney said. "Bill Miller, Luther Burges, Walter Smith – these were the main guys developing the first champions out of the gym. When Bill and Manny had a falling out and I parted ways with my trainers, Bill became my head coach in 1989.

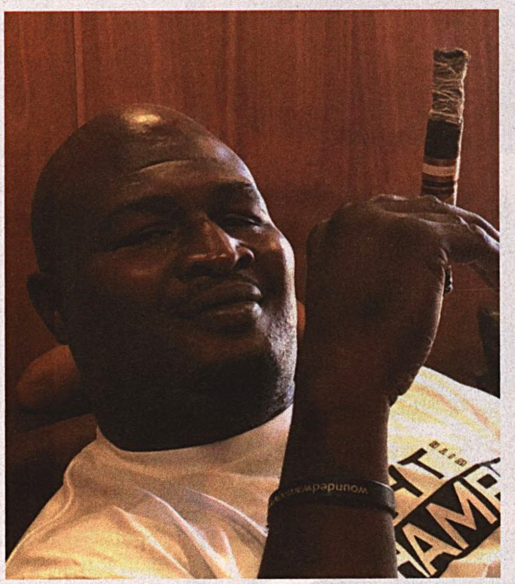
"He sat me down and said, 'We're going to do this my way. You're going to be a champion if you listen to me, I promise.'"

Toney learned how to box like the pro fighters of the 1940s under Miller's tutelage, which meant learning the finer points of craft: jabs, feints, proper hand placement and footwork, head- and upper-body movement, blocking and parrying, inside technique, combination punching and counterpunching (which he had an uncanny knack for).

Toney, who only had 33 amateur bouts, put Miller's teachings into practice during countless rounds of sparring.

"The only way to be a great fighter in this era is to box every day, and by that I mean you have to get your sparring in," Toney said. "Bill Miller is one of the greatest trainers of all time, and he told me the only way to be a real boxer is to box every day.

"I had a gym back home in Michigan for a while, and every day everyone just came in to hit bags. One day, I came in and told them I want all these bags out. I told everyone in there, 'If you ain't boxing, don't come to my gym.'



Toney did it his way, learning the finer points of boxing while enjoying the finer things in life.

"I don't know who changed the routine in boxing or why they did it, but fighters these days only spar on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I don't play that shit! I'm going to do it my way, and that's the best way. From 1987 to 2013, I boxed every day in the gym."

With Miller, who parted ways with Toney in 1995 and passed away in 2012, the education continued after gym hours at his house reviewing footage of fighters from past eras.

"Bill was a fight collector," Toney said. "He had a giant VHS tape collection and I watched them every night after training, before I went to bed. I would take a look at the greats – Henry Armstrong, Ezzard Charles, Jersey Joe Walcott – and also some of the old-time fighters most fans don't know about … Battling Siki, Gypsy Joe Harris. He introduced all these greats to me."

Toney's career far surpassed those of Siki and Harris, and had he been more disciplined, it could have been on par with Armstrong and Charles. With 92 pro fights, he fought 21 more bouts than Walcott, which was clearly too many, judging by his severely slurred speech today. However, he appears healthy; his spirits were up the day The Ring visited for this interview, and his mind remains sharp (he instantly recalled dates, locations, names and other details of every fight discussed).

When asked if he regretted fighting as long as he did or fighting at heavyweight, which brought on an added degree of physical punishment, he said he wouldn't change a thing other than be more dedicated to the sport.

"The only man that could truly beat me was me," he said.

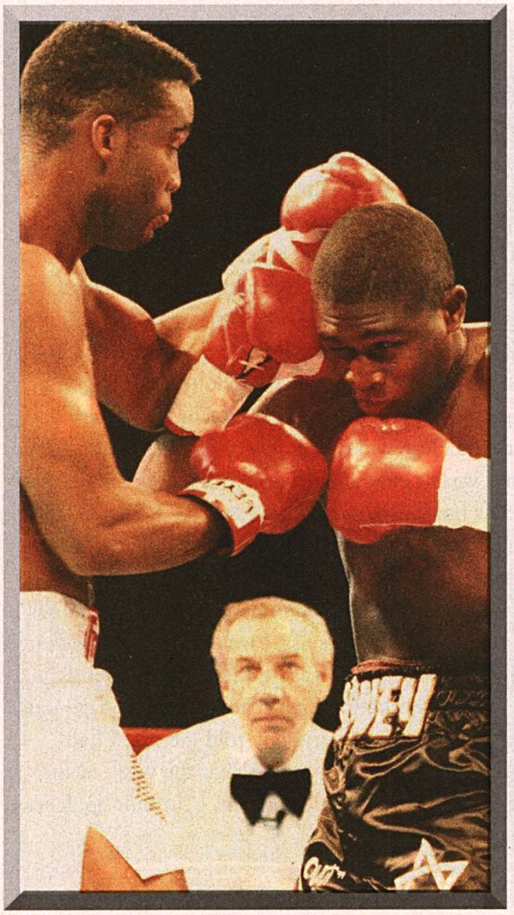
"It was always my dream to be heavyweight champ. I'm proud that 18 years after I turned pro at 157 pounds, I fought the No. 1 contender, Sam Peter, and I know I beat him. Fuck the judges!

"If I was 35 years old today, I'd challenge all the top heavyweights, starting with Deontay Wilder – because he's the easiest."

That's ole "Lights Out" for ya. He still loves boxing but adds that he doesn't like the way the sport has changed, pointing to the inactivity among top fighters and their unwillingness to challenge themselves.

"Boxing has become soft, and I have a word for what it suffers from," he said. "I call it 'bitchitis.'"

Toney has mellowed a lot with age, but he's still got some gangsta rapper in him and he remains at heart a fighter – one that certainly didn't suffer from bitchitis, as evidenced by six of his greatest hits. »

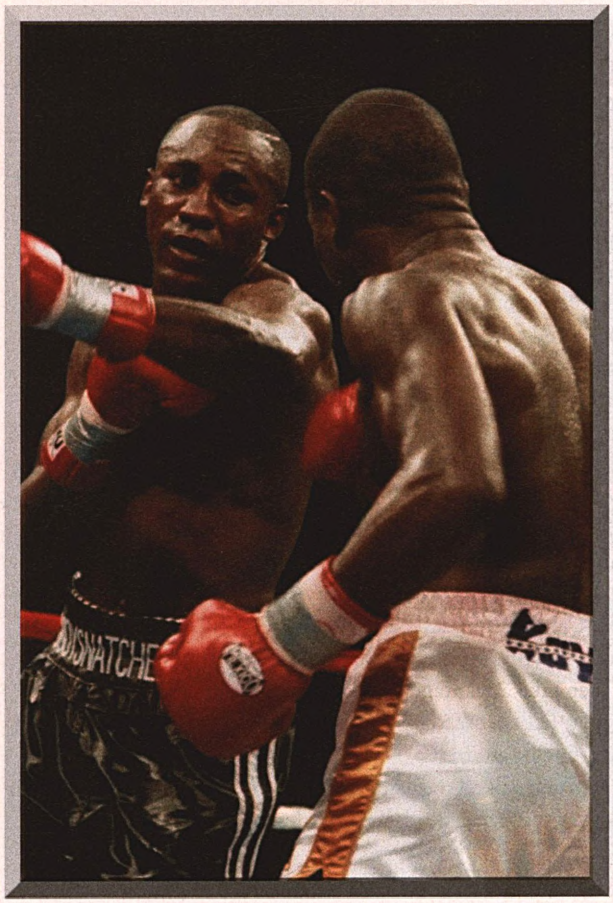


MICHAEL NUNN

May 10, 1991/John O'Donnell Stadium, Davenport, Iowa • Titles: IBF middleweight

"I wasn't even supposed to fight Michael Nunn in '91. He was supposed to fight (mandatory contender) Reggie Johnson. Didn't happen. Then Steve Collins was supposed to get the shot. Didn't happen. So, when they came to me with (the opportunity), I told (manager) Jackie (Kallen), 'You better take this damn fight. I'm going to knock him out.' She was nervous about it because Nunn was a star – he was supposed to be pound-for-pound and all that – but I didn't care. I'm a dog. I'm coming to get you no matter who you are, even in your hometown like I did Nunn. I told Michael this at the last press conference on Wednesday, and he tried to say something back and put his hand on me. I picked the motherfucker up and threw him on the table. I told him, 'You touch me again, I'll kill you.' But I knew it would be a difficult fight, because I had never fought a southpaw before. So, I trained diligently for eight weeks. I sparred every day. But come fight night, Michael had me so mad that for the first five rounds, I was trying to knock him out with one shot. Before the sixth round, Bill slapped me and told me to get back on our game. I started putting punches together – three, four and five at a time – and wearing him down. Everything changed after the fifth round. I told Bill after the seventh round, 'Pops, I got him. He won't make it,' because I started getting to his body and I could hear him grunt every time I hit him there. Before the 11th round I said, 'Pops, I'm getting him this round.' He was ready to go."

RESULT: TONEY TKO 11



MIKE MCCALLUM

December 13, 1991/Convention Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey • Titles: IBF middleweight

"Mind you, nobody wanted any part of McCallum. Mind you, Michael Nunn didn't want any part of McCallum. Mind you, McCallum was trained by Eddie Futch. Mind you, McCallum had trained at Kronk. And I didn't give a damn. At first, I thought he was old, and I was getting ready to bum rush him in the ring. But Bill had worked with him at Kronk, and he told me, 'You can't do that. You can't just run in on a veteran like McCallum. Listen to me, son. We're going to get to him with smart pressure.' Pressure busts pipes. And that's what happened to him. I settled down, I picked and picked at him – pop, pop, pop – and then we came on strong (down the stretch). I thought I won the fight, everybody did, but they gave me a draw. I grew up in that fight. Before then, I tried to knock everyone out, but with Mike, I had to be careful so I wouldn't get set up. I was more well-rounded after that fight, and that's why Mike didn't want to commit in the rematch. I was a slicker fighter; I was moving him, turning him into punches, and I also had more confidence. I knew Mike McCallum was a great fighter, but I knew I was better. And he knew I had that hot sauce for him in the rematch, which is why he ran."

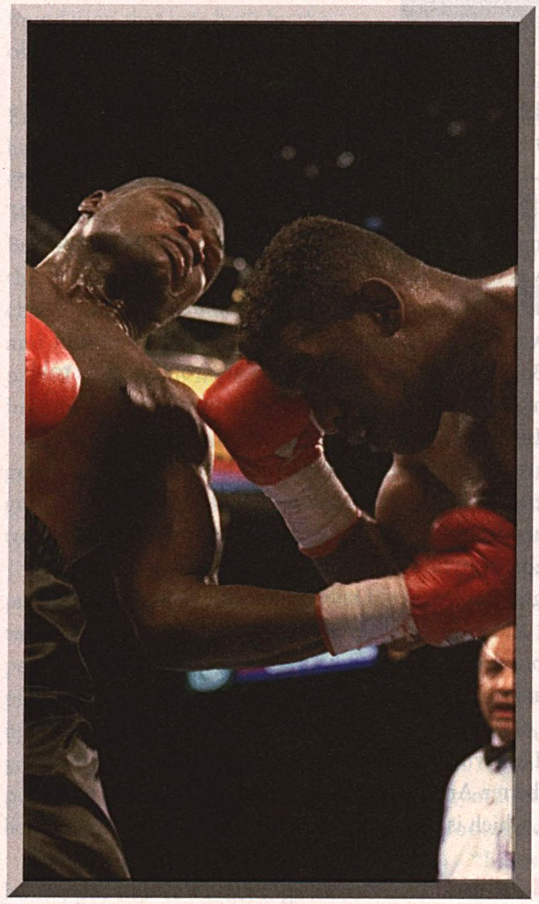
RESULT: SPLIT DRAW

IRAN BARKLEY

February 13, 1993/Caesars Palace, Las Vegas •
Titles: IBF super middleweight

"The first thing I remember about that fight was the press conferences, back when they did real press junkets, city to city. Barkley was crazy. He was trying to fight right there at the press conference in each city, and I obliged him. When we got to L.A. for the final press conference, things got out of hand. Iran actually had a blade, like his nickname, and he acted like he was trying to stab somebody. But I wasn't playin'. I tried to grab a gun from a security officer. (Barkley) got mad about that, but I don't play that shit. That was my first big Las Vegas fight, and I trained in L.A. Every day, I ran at Griffith Park up to the Hollywood sign. Every day. Believe me, I didn't like L.A. back then. I wasn't enamored with Hollywood and all that shit, so I wasn't happy. I was hoping Barkley would try to back up all the street-gang talk in the ring, because it didn't mean shit to me. I was built for this, and I knew I was gonna put it on him, because I had problems with him and his trainer, Eddie Mustafa (Muhammad). I wanted to knock Eddie out, too. I had fun whuppin' Barkley's ass. I was at my best for that fight, and I had my stamina back because I was fighting at 168 pounds. Everybody forgets I used to play football in high school. I was 205 pounds. I came down to 157 to turn pro because everybody told me that I had to fight at middleweight. But to make 160, I couldn't eat the week of the fight. So, I was strong for Barkley, and he paid for that. I cut him up. It was bloody. I probably broke parts of his face."

RESULT: TONEY TKO 9



CHARLES WILLIAMS

July 29, 1994/MGM Grand, Las Vegas •
Titles: IBF super middleweight

"He was a strong fighter, very strong. He was determined. He was taking the shots I was giving to him and coming back with his own. I fought the first half of the fight on the ropes, and I know people were thinking, 'What the hell is he doing there, letting this big, strong dude hit him?' But I could take his punches, and I was blocking most of them. People thought I was getting beat up. My eye was swollen, but he was coming in with his head and he had something in his hair, maybe Jheri Curl, and that got in my eye. But I knew what I was doing, and I knew I was hurting him with body shots and uppercuts. I could tell I was getting to him by the fourth or fifth round. But he kept coming. Just before the 12th round came, I said, 'Bill, I'm about to knock him out. It's coming.' Bill said, 'Nah, we got the win. Just move around.' Man, fuck that. I'm hard-headed. I wanted to do things my way and knock this motherfucker out. And boom! That right hand came. Lights out. Everything Bill Miller taught me over the years worked in that fight. I was taught to weaken my foes and then take advantage of them. I would slip and counter in the first half (of a fight), just touch them with accurate punches, and then land the power down the stretch. I wore my opponents down mentally, too, because I always talked to them. I'd say anything, I'd talk about their mommas, just to get in their head. But Charles didn't talk back."

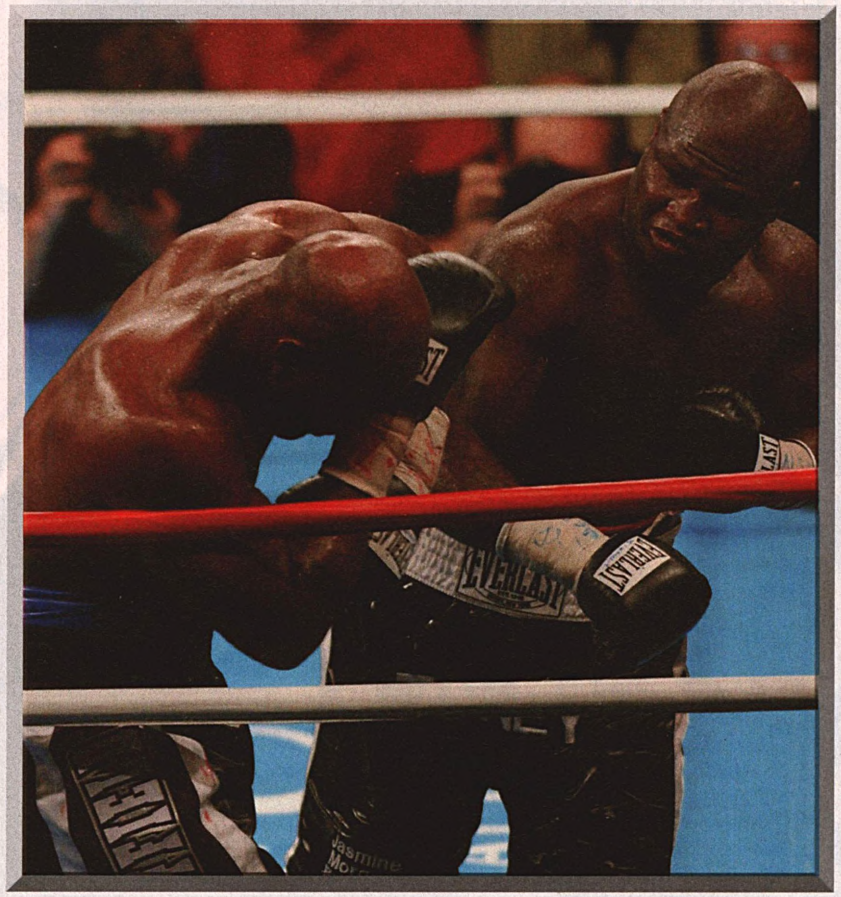
RESULT: TONEY KO 12

VASSILIY JIROV

April 26, 2003/Foxwoods Casino, Mashantucket, Connecticut • Titles: IBF cruiserweight

"He was an Olympic gold medalist. They made him the best fighter (Val Barker Award winner) at those Olympics (1996 Games). He was undefeated. He was the cruiserweight champ. He had Tommy Brooks and Thel Torrance in his corner. But what the fuck did I care? We ain't amateurs. This is the pros. What was he going to show me that I hadn't already seen? Were Tommy and Thel going to fight for him? I had my experience. I had Freddie Roach and Pops (John Arthur) in my corner. Jirov's team made it easy work for me, because they thought he could break me down with pressure. They thought he could hurt me to the body. They didn't think I was a real cruiserweight, even though they said I wasn't going to make the weight. Everybody made me the underdog, but it didn't matter. The only thing I remember about the fight itself was that I was war-ready. Anything and everything, I was ready for it. I trained like a deranged dog for that fight. I had him down in the 12th round and almost had him knocked out, just like Charles Williams. But I made my point. I will outbox the boxer, like I did Mike McCallum, and I will out-slug the slugger, like I did Iran Barkley. I can box and I can punch, but I would rather punch."

RESULT: TONEY UD 12

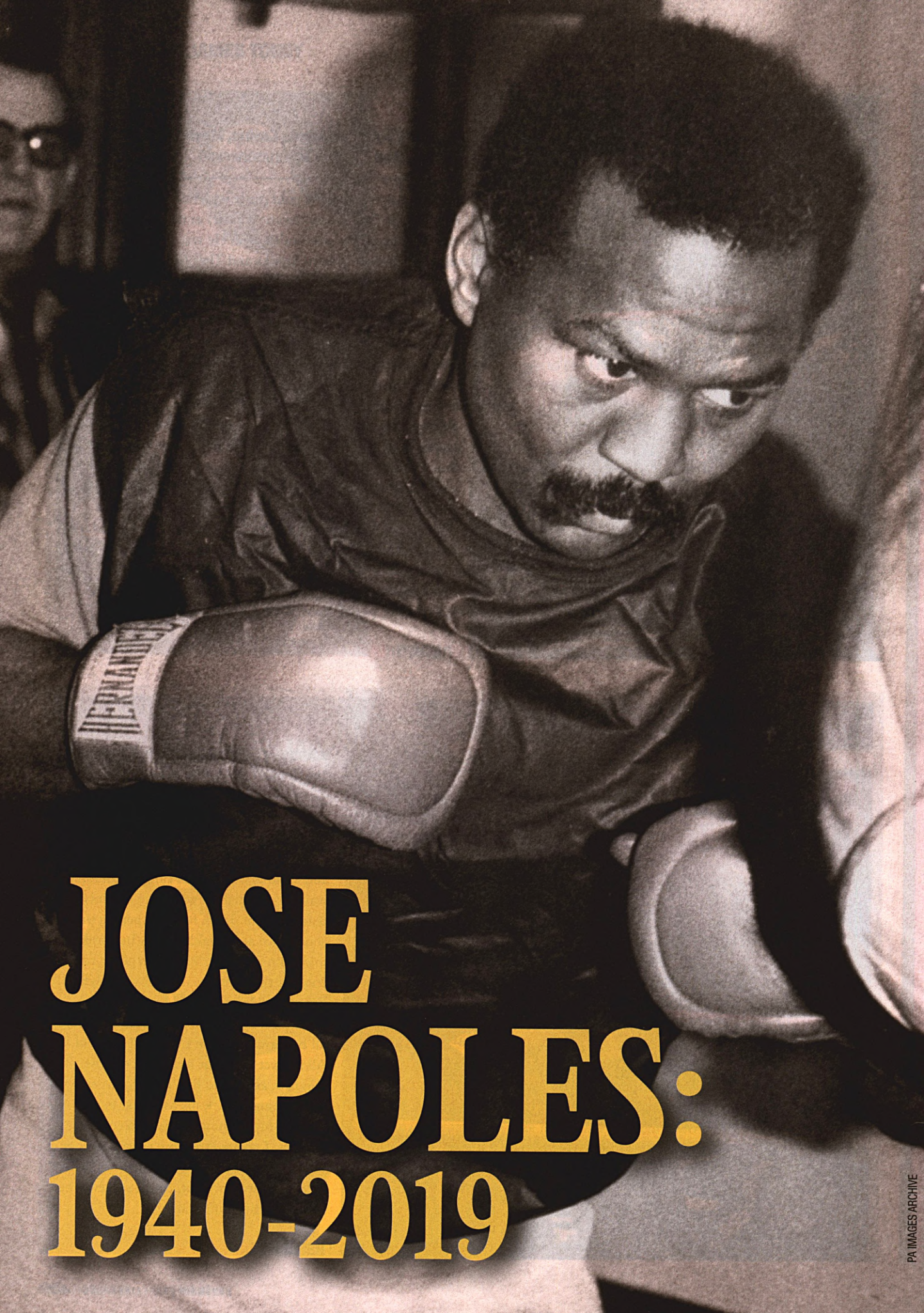


EVANDER HOLYFIELD

October 4, 2003/Mandalay Bay Casino, Las Vegas • Titles: Non-title bout

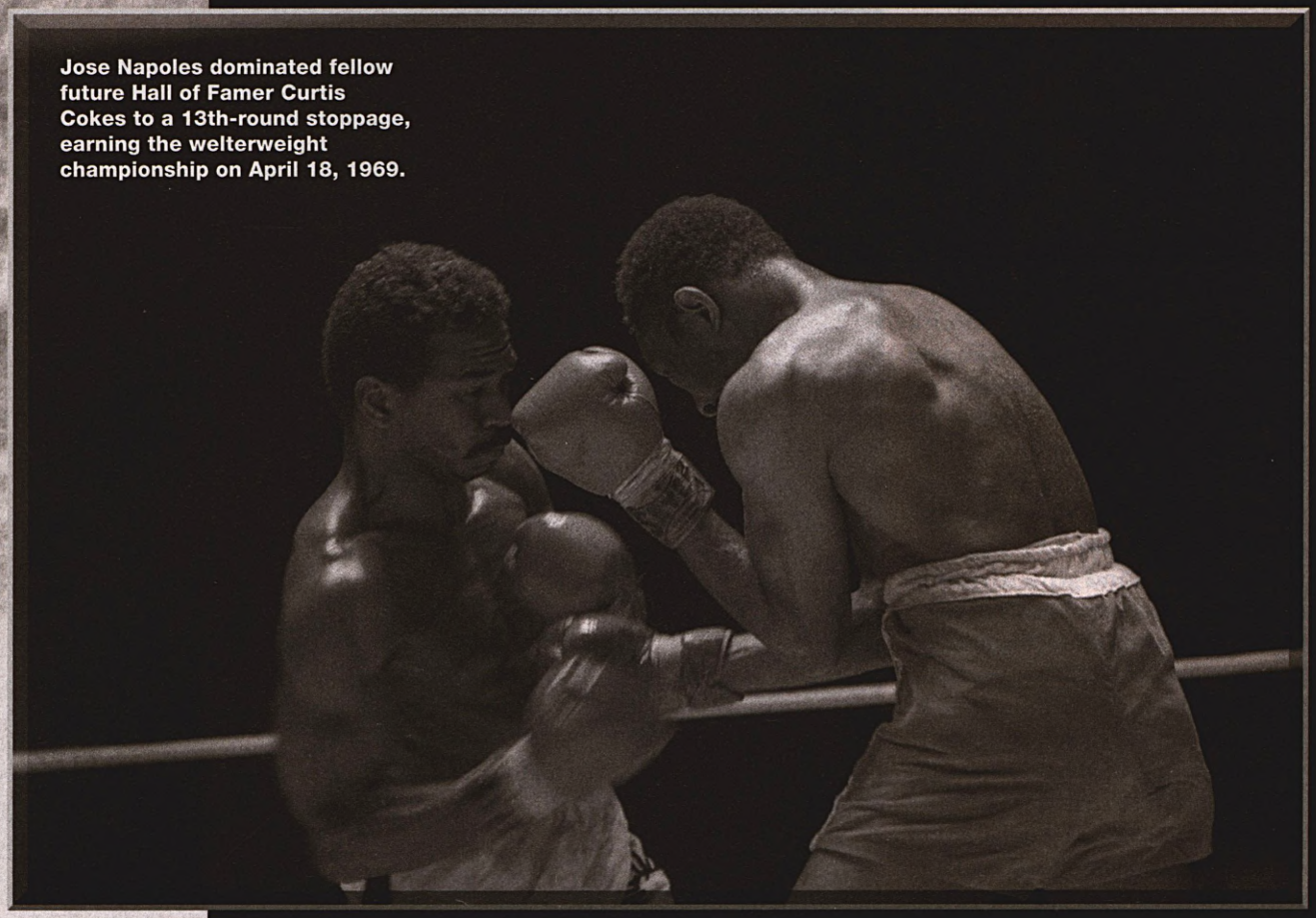
"I was confident going into that fight, because I was at the weight that I should have been my whole career. I was strong and I had another great camp. I couldn't wait for that fight. I was a fan of Holyfield. Before we sat down for the opening press conference at a steakhouse in Burbank, I told John (Arthur), 'Pops, I'm going to be cool for this one, because I love Holyfield.' But when Holyfield said I would be a good tune-up fight for him, I said, 'Pops, all bets are off. Fuck Evander Holyfield.' All respect I had for him went out the window, and I told him right to his face I was going to kick his ass. That made me step my training camp up a couple notches. I wanted to show everybody not only am I going to knock him out, but I belong at heavyweight, and I can even be heavyweight champion."

RESULT: TONEY TKO 9



JOSE NAPOLES: 1940-2019

PA IMAGES ARCHIVE



Jose Napoles dominated fellow future Hall of Famer Curtis Cokes to a 13th-round stoppage, earning the welterweight championship on April 18, 1969.

CUBA-BORN MEXICAN STAR JOSE NAPOLES PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE GREATEST WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPS EVER

By **Lee Groves**

In 1972, Sugar Ray Robinson – the consensus choice as boxing's all-time pound-for-pound practitioner – was asked who he believed was the best all-around boxer of the day. He had several names from which to choose, and they included heavyweight champion Joe Frazier, global superstar Muhammad Ali, light heavyweight terror Bob Foster and middleweight monarch Carlos Monzon. All would have been viable choices, but Robinson's pick was none other than Jose Napoles, the magnificently skilled welterweight king who was about to defend his crown in London against home-country hero Ralph Charles.

The BBC's Harry Carpenter passed on Robinson's declaration during the opening seconds of the Napoles-Charles broadcast, and over the next half-hour the Mexico-based Cuban proceeded to show why the great Sugar Ray thought so highly of him. On offense, Napoles' lightning-quick jabs set up his snappy right crosses, lethal left hooks, thudding body shots and breathtakingly extended combinations. On defense, he slipped Charles' jabs with an economical flick of the neck and averted most of his harder blows with maneuvers lifted directly from the boxing textbook. Following a quiet first round, Napoles began to separate himself from the British challenger in Round 2, then proceeded to pull away over the next four rounds. Charles, the British and Commonwealth champion, tried his best to turn the tide, but his efforts proved futile.

In Round 7, moments after Charles landed one of his best right hands, Napoles responded with a sweeping right to the face, a pair of flush one-twos to the jaw, a combination along the ropes and a right behind the ear that set up the final punch, a short left to the chin as Charles turned away. Charles, who was knocked flat on his back, bravely hauled himself up by nine, but his legs, still spaghetti-like, ultimately betrayed him and prompted referee James Brimmell

to count him out at the 2:52 mark. Charles would never fight again, and Napoles, of course, would fight on – and would do so brilliantly.

On this night – and on many other nights – Napoles was boxing's smoothest operator, so smooth that he was given the nickname "Mantequilla," the Spanish word for "butter." The moniker carried the power of truth, for while Napoles' fusion of finesse and force was unmistakable, he implemented it with a methodical silkiness that pleased the academics and with a spring-loaded explosiveness that sated those with more animalistic appetites. This wondrous skillset resulted in a welterweight reign for the ages – 13 successful defenses over two tenures that spanned all but a six-month period between April 1969 and December 1975 – a Ring Fighter of the Year award in 1969 and a spot in the International Boxing Hall of Fame (1990) as one of its charter inductees.

And now Napoles is gone. On August 16, after years of struggling with diabetes and Alzheimer's, Napoles died at age 79 in his adopted hometown of Mexico City surrounded by his children and grandchildren. While his physical suffering may be over, the legacy he leaves behind will shine brightly for all time.

Napoles was born April 13, 1940, in Santiago de Cuba, and following an amateur career that saw him amass a record of 113-1 (or 114-1, depending on the source), he turned pro with a first-round TKO of Julio Rojas on August 2, 1958. His first 21 fights (of which he won 20) were staged in Havana, but Napoles was forced to flee his homeland in 1962 when communist dictator Fidel Castro imposed a ban on all professional sports. Napoles gained asylum in Mexico and resumed his career following a 13½-month break.

Although Napoles was considered among the best at 135 and 140, thanks to victories over future world titleholder Carlos Hernandez (KO 7) and former champion Eddie Perkins (W 10) among others, he was never able to secure a championship fight in either weight class. Napoles moved up to welterweight in 1968 and soon earned a crack at champion Curtis Cokes on April 18, 1969, at The Forum in Inglewood, California. The 29-year-old Napoles, now a 10-year veteran, used stiletto-sharp jabs and piercing power shots to pick apart Cokes, whose badly swollen eyes prompted him to remain on his stool following Round 13. Although Cuban by birth, the victory transformed Napoles into a Mexican hero, so much so that President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz granted Napoles Mexican citizenship the following day.

Despite the beating he absorbed, Cokes asked for a rematch and got one 72 days later. The only difference between fight one and fight two was that Cokes retired on his stool three rounds sooner.

"He's a very good fighter," Cokes declared. "Sure as hell a better fighter than Curtis Cokes."

Then again, Napoles was better than most fighters. His title-fight victims included Emile Griffith (whom he floored in the third en route to a dominant decision win), Ernie Lopez, Billy Backus, Hedgemon Lewis, Adolph Pruitt, Roger Menetrey, Clyde Gray, Horacio Saldano and Armando Muniz. One area of his game that was nearly unmatched was his prowess in rematches. Consider: Napoles was 77-5 in his first 82 fights, and of the five losses, four were avenged by knockout. The only exception was Hilton Smith, whose eight-round decision win in August 1959 represented Napoles' first loss as a pro, and in that case a second fight never happened. Napoles' opponents didn't share his knack for revenge – those who lost to him in fight one also lost in fight two; in all, 10 fighters met that fate.

But not only did Napoles reverse losses, he often performed much better in doing so. Napoles shockingly dropped the welterweight title to Billy Backus thanks to a first-round head clash that cut Napoles' right eye and led to a fourth-round TKO loss in Backus' home area of Syracuse. To Backus' credit, he defended against Napoles in Inglewood six months later and pushed the challenger to fight at maximum capacity. Interestingly, the rematch was also stopped on a cut, this time over Backus' left eye, and Napoles took the title back by eighth-round TKO.

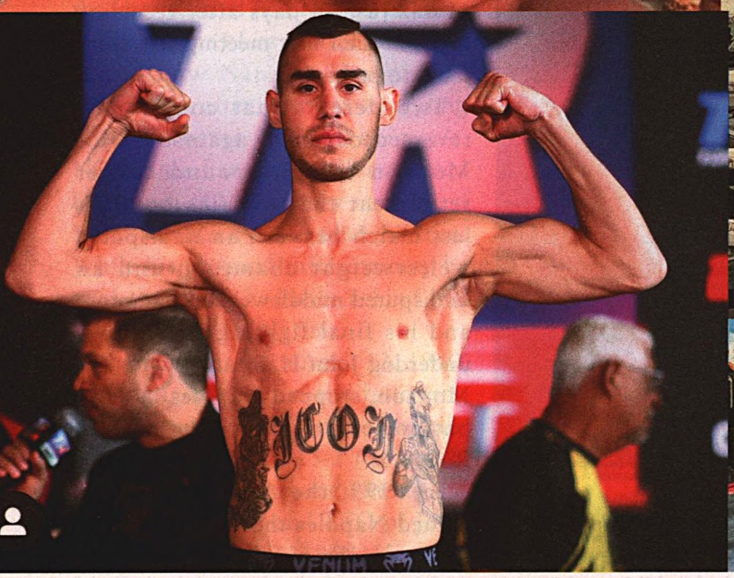
As good as Napoles was in his initial title fights against Cokes, Lopez, Lewis and Muniz (whom he struggled with before winning a controversial 12th-round technical decision due to a cut), he improved on his results there as well. He stopped Cokes and Lopez in fewer rounds, TKO'd Lewis in nine following a decision in fight one and scored a dominant points win over Muniz just 74 days after receiving a gift in their first meeting, a victory fated to be his last.

Two defeats that couldn't be reversed occurred against Carlos Monzon (a sixth-round corner retirement that remains boxing's last match between an undisputed welterweight champion and an undisputed middleweight champion) and his final fight against 9-to-1 underdog John H. Stracey, who, like Monzon, stopped Napoles in six – but not before hitting the deck in Round 1.

In 1999, the Associated Press named Napoles the fourth greatest welterweight of all time, and only his fragile brows would prevent him from winning almost every conceivable dream match. Skill for skill, Napoles stood near the top of the ladder, a fact that even the occupant of the highest welterweight rung – Robinson – recognized.

Napoles' final record reads 81-7 (54 KOs), and the countless moments of brilliance contained therein will earn him everlasting honor from everyone who had the pleasure of watching him perform. Rest in peace. RING

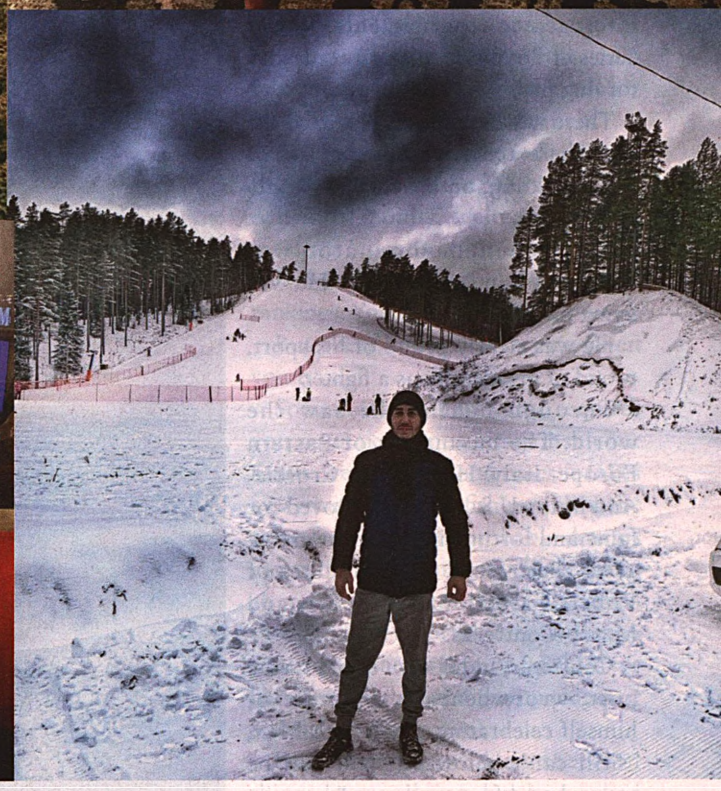
Napoles' style was as smooth as his nickname, but he could also punch, scoring more than 50 KOs in his 81 victories.



A PICTURE OF HEARTBREAK

MAXIM DADASHEV WAS LIVING OUT HIS DREAM THROUGH BOXING WHEN FATE STRUCK ITS CRUELEST BLOW

By **Tris Dixon**



Posts from Maxim Dadashev's Instagram account depict a young boxer in the prime of life.

"Tomorrow will be super hot."

There was a flames emoji next to the words, which were simple but laced with desire and ambition.

One of the pictures that accompanied the Instagram post showed a lean, muscular Maxim Dadashev weighed-in and ready to go. A second had him standing beside his opponent, Puerto Rican Subriel Matias, and a third shot had them head to head, looking deeply into each other's souls.

Dadashev was ready for the heat. He was prepared to do what it took to make his dreams come true, to provide for his wife, Elizabeth (Elizaveta Apushkina), and their 2-year-old son, Daniel.

The next post on his account came four days later.

It was made by his widow.

"My love! You are forever in my heart, the soul breaks from pain without you. The hardest time has come in our family." Dadashev died on July 23 from brain injuries suffered during his fight with Matias.

There were two further posts on "Mad" Max's account. One featured

a family photo of Dadashev, his bride and their little boy, thanking friends, fighters and fans from around the world for their condolences.

The final post, July 30, somberly announced: "Farewell to my husband will be held on Sunday 4 August at 9am in the St Petersburg morgue of the Mykolaiv Hospital."

It's all so very grim.

Then, however, one sifts through 398 memories Dadashev captured on his Instagram. As a young amateur in Russia, he first posted on September 1, 2013.

It was a black and white shot – he was getting gloved up, wore an amateur vest – and as the story in 398 frames went on, there were international tournaments, World Series of Boxing events and Dadashev turning pro.

There were vacations. He loved the sea. There are numerous pictures of him jet skiing, on beaches, on boats and so forth.

A common denominator was happiness. He smiled often. He was living his best life.

He was clearly proud of his sport, proud of his identity as a fighter.

Through boxing, he saw the world. The mountains of Eastern Europe. Italy. He went to Croatia. And in the U.S., where he moved for fame and fortune in this unforgiving game, he trained with the likes of Robert Garcia, Buddy McGirt and Marco Contreras.

Contreras, in his own social media post, wrote beneath a picture of himself celebrating a win with Max, "Still can't believe it, you will be remembered forever champ."

Dadashev trained at the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood, in the mountains of Big Bear, in Oxnard – all over California. He went to Las Vegas, where he fought three times, and he met the likes of Roberto Duran, Terence Crawford and James Toney.

He was living a young pro's dream, signed by manager Egis Klimas and promoted by Top Rank. He became friendly with managerial stablemates Sergey

One of Dadashev's best pro victories was a decision over former lightweight titleholder Antonio DeMarco in October 2018.

Kovalev, Aleksandr Usyk and Vasiliy Lomachenko. And then, on October 8, 2016, he announced his greatest achievement, the birth of his son.

Still he made memories. He ticked things off a bucket list any young man, any young fighter, could only dream of doing. Through boxing, he was living out his fantasies.

In mid-2017, he started posting in English as well as his native Russian tongue; he watched Hollywood films and they helped him learn the language. He hoped Elizabeth would relocate with him to California. That was the plan, right after this fight.

Life was beyond good; it was the dream he had always wanted. A healthy family, seeing the world, meeting legends, training with the best, friends in the pound-for-pound rankings. You couldn't hope for more.

But there is a price to pay when you box.

Sometimes the hurt game requires you to make deposits against your future well-being. Sometimes it takes everything in one selfish payment, the price for chasing improbable dreams in a sport where so many bleak times, so much loneliness is not conveyed through 398 colorful, largely happy posts over the course of 2,192 days between the first and final pictures of a social media account.

Dadashev showed us the cool things he was doing, but he worked tirelessly behind closed doors, not showing us what he endured to earn the life he enjoyed.

"He was very regimented in the gym," said trainer Buddy McGirt, who was with Dadashev for two fights. "When he trained, he didn't want anyone talking to him or me; he wanted my 150 percent attention."

"He was always a friendly guy and he was a very respectful young man," reflected ESPN's Steve Kim, who'd

Dadashev, who was outgunned against Matias but not overwhelmed, had his moments during the fight.

SCOTT TAETSCH

met Max on the West Coast boxing beat. "He was the type of guy who, if he saw you, he would always say hello and shake your hand."

Dadashev had racked up 281 wins as an amateur against 20 losses. As a pro, he had beaten the likes of Darleys Perez and Antonio DeMarco on his way to being the 13-0 contender who would face Matias in an IBF 140-pound title eliminator.

"Max was a very good puncher," McGirt opined. "He had all the tools to be a world champion. Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Early in the bout at the MGM National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Maryland, the ESPN commentary crew – including Joe Tessitore, Timothy Bradley and Andre Ward – acknowledged the thudding sound of the shots Matias was landing.

Through the contest, as Dadashev reddened around his arms and body, the team agreed that Max was swimming against a strong tide. He was having to fight almost all-out to keep the marauding Matias off him.

"Matias' punches are hard and fast, and the one thing that was really evident was his physical strength," recalled Kim, who was ringside. "He really was a lot stronger than Maxim. And what really added to the problem was (Matias) had a very good engine."

By the halfway point, the Puerto Rican's corner informed their man that Max was slowing. The middle rounds were dominant for Matias, and Bradley reckoned Dadashev's mission was now survival rather than victory.

McGirt recalled Max telling him, "Buddy, his punches hurt a lot."

"That's when I started keeping an eye on him," McGirt said. "When I saw the guy around Round 9 picking it up, he stepped on the gas, and Max couldn't step on the gas no more. When he got hit at the end of the 11th round, I said that's it. (Matias) was only going to come out stronger again in the next round, and it wasn't worth it at that point."

Kim saw the fight swing irreversibly in the Puerto Rican's favor: "I noticed that Maxim had to box and he had to move, but he was moving so much it was very difficult for him at times to actually plant his feet and throw hard enough punches to stave off Matias. There was this fine line between movement and retreat and boxing and just backing up."

Live on ESPN – before the final round – Buddy was recorded telling his disconsolate student, "Max, I'm going to stop the fight. You're getting hit too much. Please. Please, Max. If I don't, the referee's going to stop it."

Initial protests gave way to a distant stare, and McGirt withdrew his man.

"People asked me why I asked him about quitting the fight," Buddy recalled. "My mind was already made up. I was showing him the respect. My mind was made up no matter what, but I wanted to let him know what page I was on out of respect for him."

Dadashev remained on his stool, staring vacantly, even during the announcement of the decision.

Kim, who visited the hospital where Dadashev was taken to update ESPN on his condition the night of the fight, said, "I never got the sense that this fight was so lopsided in one direction that it should have been waved off earlier than it was. I actually think Max had some good moments in rounds 8, 9 and 10, and then in Round 11 you really saw things go one way, and you thought someone may think about waving it off. Nobody ringside – from the people that were there with Top Rank, media members, other observers, intelligent fans at ringside – there was not this big outcry that the fight was stopped too late. I didn't hear any second-guessing of Buddy McGirt that night."

The immediate aftermath of the bout is being investigated by the Maryland State Athletic Commission, and we might get some answers. But nothing can change what happened that night.

Perhaps it will cause some procedures to be amended, moving forward.

"I would think and hope that if you're the Maryland commission that you have to replay every minute," Kim concluded. "You've got to review, you've got to reflect and you've really got to ask yourself, 'How can we improve the process? How can we get better in a situation like this?' I'm not saying it could have been prevented. This is unfortunately a byproduct of a very violent and difficult sport. And I hate to say it, but it's bound to happen again. But you have to close these windows of opportunity for a tragedy to occur."

The St. Petersburg fighter was ready to apply for his green card. Elizabeth was going to be joining him after the fight. It was a new start, only for the end to unexpectedly come.

Top Rank Inc., Dadashev's promoter, created a GoFundMe page – the sport's now-reflexive, short-term fix for an age-old problem before the big wheels begin churning and another fighter is condemned to the statistical reference books.

The fight was on Friday. Max died on Tuesday. He went from 13-0 to 13-1, but that one loss took everything from him and his loved ones.

It also placed an unwanted burden on the shoulders of the man in the opposite corner, Matias.

"No one is prepared to die while looking for dreams and goals," he said in a statement. "We simply go up to the ring thinking about the well-being for our family without knowing how complicated and difficult it is to get into the ring. Fly high, great warrior. Only God knows the reason of things. You will always have my respect."

Plenty of winning fighters do not escape these moments unscathed; their lives go on, but they do so in an altered state.

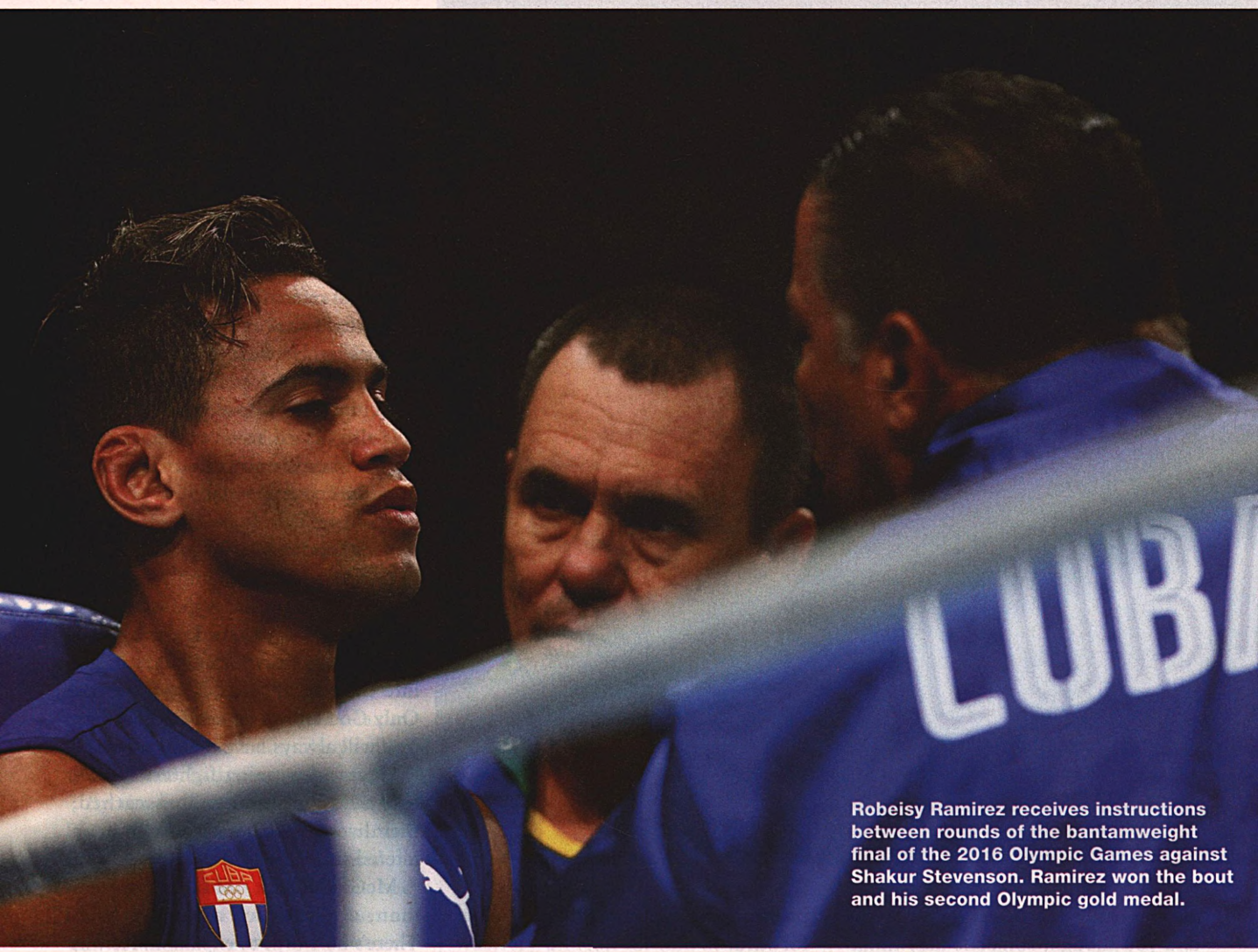
McGirt added, "Max was a great man, a great guy, a great friend. There's no words to explain it. He was just a good dude, you know?"

In the following weeks, McGirt tossed and turned in his sleep. He thought about the stoppage, about Max and about his family. He thought about the whole story.

"You can't sleep," he said. "You're up every night. He was so young. He'd just had a kid, and now he's not going home to them. It's something that's going to stick in my mind forever. And Max will always be in my mind."

Maxim Dadashev was 28 years old, but he will stay with us forever and he will remain forever young.

THE PERILS OF EXCELLENCE



Robeisy Ramirez receives instructions between rounds of the bantamweight final of the 2016 Olympic Games against Shakur Stevenson. Ramirez won the bout and his second Olympic gold medal.

PROFESSIONAL CUBAN BOXERS ARE SOMETIMES PLAGUED BY THE VERY TALENTS THAT MADE THEM FAMOUS AS AMATEURS

By **Brin-Jonathan Butler**

On August 10, two-time Olympic champion Robeisy Ramirez had his ESPN-televised professional debut in a four-round fight in Philadelphia. The much-lauded 25-year-old Cuban faced Adan Gonzales, a handpicked 4-2-2 journeyman from Denver.

As Ramirez entered the ring with a Cuban flag clenched in one glove and an American flag in the other, ESPN commentator Joe Tessitore briefly and glibly inventoried the injustices Ramirez had suffered in his native Cuba since birth: "Robeisy Ramirez lived through all that garbage heap from the communistic regime and now, thanks to a group of dedicated liberators in Florida, he gets *this*." Going into the fight, Ramirez's perilous escape from Cuba to America via Mexico, sponsored through a kind of venture humanitarianism in Florida, had been featured in a long article written by Greg Bishop in Sports Illustrated. Mark Kriegel had profiled Ramirez's journey in a promotional featurette video for ESPN titled "From Cuba To Stardom, the Rise of Robeisy Ramirez." Top Rank had signed Ramirez back in May to a multi-year contract. CEO Bob Arum compared his expectations for Ramirez to the last two-time Olympic gold medalist he signed, Vasiliy Lomachenko, most experts' choice for the best pound-for-pound fighter on earth. "We anticipate the same from Robeisy," Arum explained. "He is truly a special talent." The coverage provided the kind of momentum few athletes across sports enjoy entering the professional ranks. His narrative, like many elite Cuban athlete defectors before him – Orlando "El Duque" Hernandez, Yuriorkis Gamboa, Yasiel Puig – was packaged to transcend sports and illuminate the many reassuring virtues of America opening its arms to provide someone like Ramirez a new home and opportunity to flourish.

Yet only 22 seconds into the fight, Gonzales had already scored a knockdown against the highly favored Cuban phenom. With his bleach-quaffed hair, Robeisy's nonchalant expression accepting the referee's count resembled *Saved By the Bell's* Zack Morris receiving a lecture from the high school principal after arriving late for class.

But the spell Ramirez's credentials and press-push had cast quickly evaporated as boxing fans took the measure of what was happening right in front of their eyes. Ramirez didn't panic or show any signs of urgency to recover; astonishingly, his response to being knocked down so soon was to show disdain followed closely by apathy. While he had won his first 129 amateur fights and defeated elite competitors such as Shakur Stevenson, Michael Conlan, Murodjon Akhmadaliev and Tugstsogt Nyambayar (all undefeated as professional boxers today), he seemed perplexingly unbothered as he went through the motions against the unheralded Gonzales.

Unheralded Adan Gonzalez lands a jolting left to Ramirez's chin en route to his shocking upset victory.

Eight years earlier, I watched Ramirez dazzle his countrymen by winning his first national championship in Cuba at 17. The spirit and drive he showed fighting for the equivalent of $20 a month bore little resemblance to the fighter who entered the ring in Philadelphia with millions of dollars on the line down the road if his career took off. All those credentials amounted to little more than postage, as it was abundantly clear from the opening bell this fight was being mailed in.

As the rounds wore on, Ramirez's performance was so oddly uninspired, his conditioning and preparedness for the night so glaringly maladroit as he basically coasted to a split-decision loss that it might rank up there in terms of a noteworthy Cuban crash-and-burn with amateur legend Jorge Luis Gonzalez's 1995 six-round humiliation against Riddick Bowe. The 6-foot-7 Gonzalez as an amateur had defeated Bowe (and knocked him down four times in the process), Lennox Lewis, Tyrell Biggs, and Teofilo Stevenson before Bowe exposed the Cuban's limitations as a pro. Nobody in the boxing world is confusing Adan Gonzales for Riddick Bowe as an opponent, though. The trouble for Ramirez is that an opponent nobody had ever heard of – one meant to showcase his brilliance – instead glaringly exposed Ramirez's limitations in terms of spirit and will, both of which one would expect he'd have in abundance given the situation he had escaped to enter the professional ranks in America.

After all the buildup and press coverage surrounding Ramirez's remarkable backstory, his harshest critics have been given heavy ammunition. After fleeing his

homeland, abandoning his three daughters to navigate the dangerous gauntlet of six months in Mexico, Ramirez was forced to avoid the looming threat of drug cartels kidnapping and ransoming him off to the highest bidder. Senator Marco Rubio was enlisted to help facilitate Ramirez's entry into the U.S. A small fortune was necessary to cover the enormous expenses of lawyers and keeping him afloat until he arrived safely across the border. And yet, with all of this effort and sacrifice to get Ramirez to his debut in Philadelphia, *this* was the performance Ramirez mustered to make it all worthwhile for himself and everyone involved in furnishing him with the opportunity?

It is not the first time that a Cuban athlete with such obvious talent and motivation has inexplicably squandered his ticket to stardom and riches. In some ironic cases, however, it is the American attitude toward those extraordinary talents employed in the much-maligned "Cuban style" that lays the groundwork for a shock of a very different sort.

Less than two months before Ramirez's career derailed so spectacularly in Philadelphia, another legendary two-time Cuban Olympic champion, Guillermo Rigondeaux, nearing the age of 40, fought against rugged Mexican contender Julio Ceja in Las Vegas to keep his career alive a decade after he defected from Cuba, branded by Fidel Castro personally as a "Judas" and "traitor" to the Cuban people. Since Rigondeaux had turned professional in 2009, perhaps no fighter has been more publicly criticized by boxing writers and promoters. And this despite his only professional loss happening in late 2017 against the much bigger and younger Lomachenko two weight classes above where Rigondeaux won his titles and his most notable victory, a 2013 dismantling of Nonito Donaire at Radio City Music Hall. Almost right out of the gates as a pro, Rigondeaux seemed to exemplify everything American boxing fans despised about the stereotypically methodical and bloodless Cuban style. After the success and exposure of the Donaire victory, paradoxically Rigondeaux's career and reputation had never been more tarnished or ridiculed. Bizarrely, he became boxing's most notorious outcast in an era that celebrated the majesty of an even more risk-averse, defensive wizard in Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Ramirez's 2019 interview to gain entry into the U.S. took place in Tijuana, Mexico, which was also the location of the first live fight of Rigondeaux's I attended in 2010, 10 months and six fights into his career, embarking on a biography about the fighter called *A Cuban Boxer's Journey: Guillermo Rigondeaux, from Castro's Traitor to American Champion* published in 2014. I had first met Rigondeaux back in Havana shortly after his attempted defection in 2007, during the Pan Am Games in Brazil. Castro had thrown him off the Olympic team competing in Beijing, and essentially Rigondeaux had committed social suicide by seeking to escape from the island. Like Ramirez, almost immediately after arriving in the U.S., Rigondeaux signed with Top Rank and was hailed by Bob Arum as an extraordinary talent he was seeking to bring to the widest audience possible. Yet the deafening Mexican crowd chant of "Bicicleta! Bicicleta! Bicicleta!" (Bicycle! Bicycle! Bicycle!) at the Auditorio Municipal in Tijuana was a harbinger of what was to come for Rigondeaux: undeniably supreme ability on display juxtaposed with almost unanimous disapproval and disdain from the boxing public. The vitriol reached its apogee when Lomachenko's dominance and a bruised hand forced Rigondeaux to quit on his stool after six rounds. What was left of his career prospects at age 37 looked bleak. After 13 months of inactivity, he rebounded with a knockout victory against Giovanni Delgado. He earned a reported $25,000 purse for the fight, a mere fraction of the career-high $750,000 he'd earned against Donaire in 2013, and one-sixteenth of the $400,000 to face Lomachenko.

Then came the WBC junior featherweight title eliminator fight against Ceja on June 23, one of the most unexpected, all-action, back-and-forth phone booth wars of the year. Rigondeaux, one of boxing's greatest defensive geniuses and precise surgeons of the sweet science, threw everything we knew about his style out the window and fought as if he was auditioning for the lead role in an Arturo Gatti biography. After weathering an early first-round onslaught of bombs, Ceja welcomed the barroom brawl approach from the 38-year-old Rigondeaux and proceeded to outthrow and land against the aging Cuban legend. Rigondeaux, malevolently calculating and evasive throughout his life in the ring, abandoned any pretense of setting traps or embarking on any overarching strategy, content instead to trade firepower even after being repeatedly shaken by blows and clearly falling behind on the scorecards. It may only be a slight exaggeration to say he took more punishment in the first seven rounds he fought against Ceja than he had endured in his entire professional career; quite possibly you could include his entire amateur career while you are at it. This is what made the fight so freakishly arresting to watch unfold. In the final seconds of the eighth round, after both fighters were penalized for low blows, Rigondeaux unleashed a vicious left hand that sent Ceja onto his back. After the Mexican valiantly rose at the count of six, the referee looked into his crossed eyes and waved the surreal action to its conclusion.

Rigondeaux offered a post-fight explanation for his new style:

"People were saying that I get on the bicycle and run a lot," he said through his translator. "That's not true. I showed I can fight at short distance. The left came and that ended the fight."

STEVE MARCUS

The aging Guillermo Rigondeaux dug deep to halt Julio Ceja, much to the delight of fans.

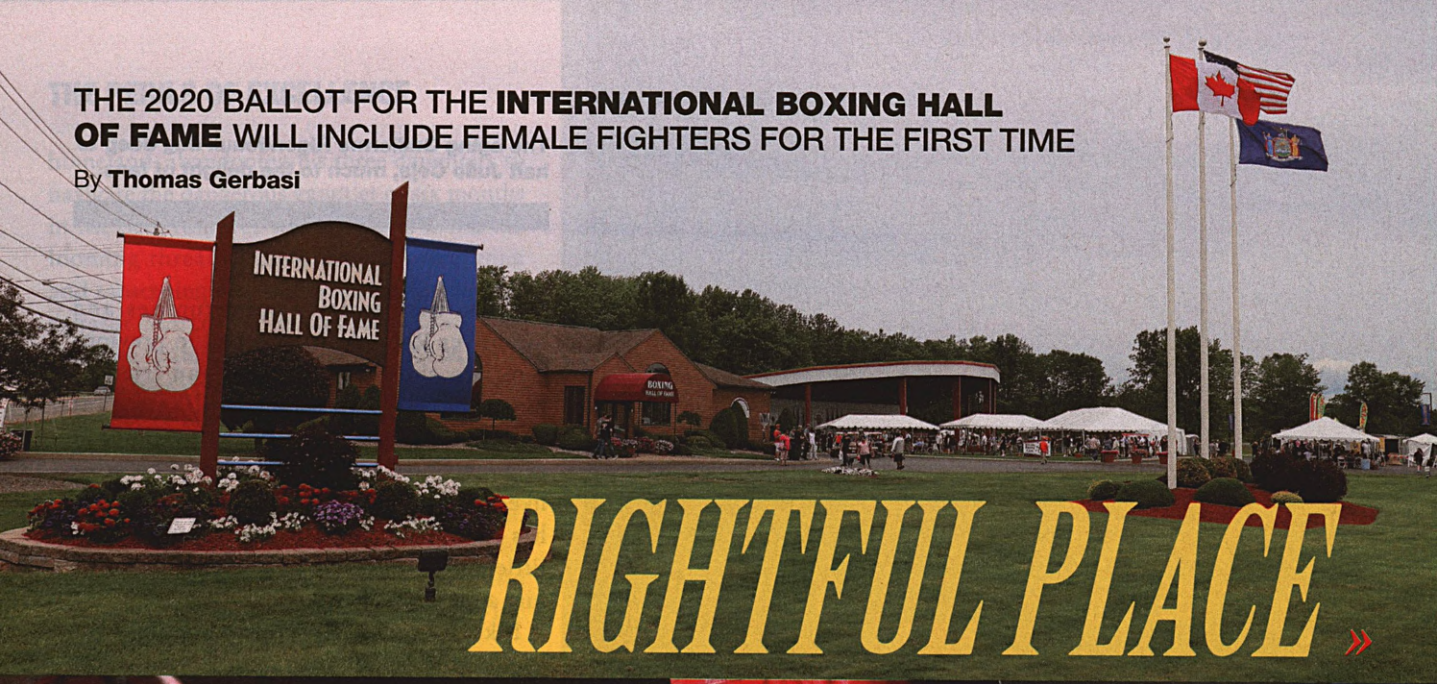
Given the lucrative opportunities and incentives Rigondeaux has had in previous fights to showcase this new fan-friendly brawling style, it seems unlikely that criticism of his style brought this about at this late juncture in his career. The most likely explanation is Rigondeaux, at his age, has diminished physically enough that he has little ability to employ the style that made him a pariah in the sport.

Like Ramirez, Rigondeaux risked his life leaving behind his family a decade ago in Cuba – a wife and two sons – for an opportunity to fight professionally in the U.S. He called the journey in the speedboat with human smugglers the most traumatic event of his life. I illegally interviewed his family in 2011 at his former residence in Havana. They fully expected to be reunited with him and told me he sent money from his fight purses to help them survive. Rigondeaux's father disowned him as a son for betraying the ideals of the Cuban revolution when he attempted to defect in 2007, while his mother fully supported his journey to America. They have both died since Rigondeaux arrived in Florida to begin his new life. The Cuban government forbids athletes who fled the island's control to return for eight years.

Ramirez and Rigondeaux are responsible for four of the 37 Olympic gold medals Cuba has won (73 medals in all) since Fidel Castro banned professional sports on his island in 1962. Cuba, despite being an impoverished nation of only 11 million people, has been the most dominant nation on earth at amateur boxing for most of the time since. Ramirez is only the latest Cuban hero to escape the notorious system that helped create him. In many ways, Rigondeaux overcame huge odds to secure a modest fortune (by boxing standards) in career earnings, and he arguably became one of the most accomplished Cuban boxers ever in the pros. He was certainly one of the most feared and avoided. And yet Rigondeaux's legacy also suggests a cautionary tale that Ramirez, whose head may have been overinflated by his success in the amateurs, might do well to consider long and hard: that the tragedy of leaving behind so much of what made him Cuban might now require abandoning yet another piece of that identity – the mentality, attitude and in some ways even the practice of the "Cuban style" itself – if he is to find lasting success in the destination he gave up everything to reach. Rigondeaux may have learned the lesson in time for one last payday; doing the same could be Ramirez's only chance at redemption.

THE 2020 BALLOT FOR THE **INTERNATIONAL BOXING HALL OF FAME** WILL INCLUDE FEMALE FIGHTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME

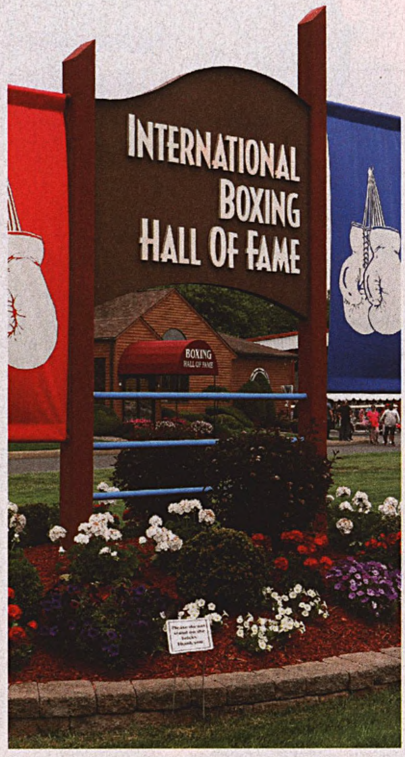
By **Thomas Gerbasi**



RIGHTFUL PLACE »

(Clockwise from top right) Female boxing legends Holly Holm, Christy Martin, Lucia Rijker, Regina Halmich and Laila Ali are strong candidates for a history-making ballot.

DEFINED



In another summer full of twists and turns both in and out of the ring, one of the most important developments flew under the radar when the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York, announced in July that the ladies of the sweet science were finally going to have the opportunity to earn a plaque among the immortals of the sport.

For women who have long fought for equality in boxing, this was a monumental move, and while exposure and purses aren't yet on par with the men, this is a step that is long overdue.

So this fall, ballots will go out to a selection of boxing historians and journalists who will vote on which women will make up the Class of 2020 in Modern and Trailblazer categories. There has been no official word on how many inductees will make the cut in the first year, but odds are good that one, two or several of the following names will be on that list.

LAILA ALI

24-0 (21 KOs)

The daughter of "The Greatest" became an all-time great in her own right over the course of an eight-year career (1999-2007) that saw her dominate at super middleweight and even step up to light heavyweight with a knockout of Gwendolyn O'Neil in 2004. Blessed with size, speed, power and swagger, Ali went from being seen as a novelty act early in her career (a phase that reached its height with her 2001 bout against Jacqui Frazier-Lyde) to a legitimate champion and dominant force at 168 pounds, despite that division historically being one of the thinnest in women's boxing. That's the good news. The bad is that we never got to see Ali against the likes of Ann Wolfe or Veronica Simmons. The absence of a fight with Wolfe is a particularly sore spot with fans who expected that the power-hitting Texan would have given Ali the test of her life and perhaps a series worthy of her dad's bouts with Joe Frazier. This blemish aside, Ali's dominance and her ability to take the sport mainstream make her a lock for an eventual call to Canastota.

REGINA HALMICH

54-1-1 (16 KOs)

As women's boxing began to gain notoriety in the United States on the shoulders of Christy Martin in the mid-90s, the biggest star in the sport may have been living and fighting in Germany. Ranked second on The Ring's all-time list in 2016, Halmich fought in a remarkable 46 world title fights, winning and defending belts at 108 and 112 pounds against some of the best talent in the sport during a nearly 14-year career. Her lone loss came in her only U.S. bout against Yvonne Trevino when the ringside physician stopped the fight due to a cut UNDER Halmich's eye. She never got to avenge that defeat, but the German was undeterred by the setback, as she went on to win her next 37 bouts before a draw with Elena Reid in 2004. Halmich did get to settle matters with Reid as part of a nine-fight winning streak to end a career that deserves the honor of a Hall of Fame nod. Simply put, Halmich was one of the best to ever do it during the first golden age of the sport.

HOLLY HOLM

33-2-3 (9 KOs)

When Holly Holm was competing, the state of women's boxing was so bad in terms of public perception and exposure that there are fans out there who only know of "The Preacher's Daughter" as a former UFC women's bantamweight champion and one of the mixed martial arts world's top fighters. But make no mistake about it; Holm was one of the elite in the sweet science from 2002 to 2013, when she took on and beat the best at junior welterweight, welterweight and junior middleweight, and became a franchise in her hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fighting at home allowed Holm to make a career for herself at a time when finding women's boxing on television was about as frequent as a Halley's Comet sighting. Unfortunately, it kept her from reaching more than just the diehards, despite wins over the likes of Christy Martin, Mary Jo Sanders, Chevelle Hallback and Jane Couch. In 2011, Holm suffered a vicious knockout at the hands of Anne Sophie Mathis, but six months later, she avenged that loss, leaving a lasting impression among fight fans. Holm retired from the sport in 2013, leaving a proposed fight with Cecilia Braekhus on the table, but she quickly rose to the top of the MMA world with no regrets.

CHRISTY MARTIN

49-7-3 (31 KOs)

In 2017, the Boxing Writers Association of America announced that it was creating its first female fighter of the year award. But this award, like others issued by the organization, needed a name. Christy Martin was that name, and it was a no-brainer of a choice. Forget the hellacious left hooks and the knockouts on Don King undercards. For a generation of fight fans, "The Coal Miner's Daughter" was women's boxing, and when Martin appeared on the cover of Sports Illustrated in 1996, she was as recognizable to the public as many of her male peers. In the ring, Martin was a brawler of the highest order, willing to take one to give two, adding to her appeal. Sure, the competition was questionable at times, but there were more than enough wins over quality foes like Belinda Laracuente, Kathy Collins and her future wife, Lisa Holewyne, that there is no doubting Martin's credentials. Losses to Laila Ali and Holly Holm put a dent in the aura of invincibility a 45-2-2 start to her career had built, but the greatest loss of Martin's career occurred when her 2005 superfight with Lucia Rijker was scrapped due to a Rijker injury, never to be rescheduled.

LUCIA RIJKER

17-0 (14 KOs)

If Christy Martin was the people's choice during her prime in the ring, Lucia Rijker was the heroine to the hardcores, the boxing equivalent of a local band playing in a little club that you want all to yourself but that eventually goes on to play stadiums around the globe. In other words, once the word got out on "The Dutch Destroyer," everyone got on board and they all wanted to see Rijker fight Martin in a clash of titans that would have been the biggest fight in women's boxing history. It almost happened in 2005 before an Achilles injury scrapped the bout, and we never saw Rijker fight again. So why is she on this list with only 17 fights and just one world title fight victory? Well, because she was the best fighter in the world when she competed. A former kickboxer, Rijker walked through practically everyone she faced under boxing rules, scoring knockouts over Chevelle Hallback, Lisa Ested and Marcela Eliana Acuna along the way. You might even describe her as a female Mike Tyson, as she beat many of her foes before they even stepped through the ropes. She wouldn't have intimidated Martin, though, making their scuttled bout one of the great "what ifs" in boxing history. Will such questions hurt Rijker's candidacy for the IBHOF? They might, but they shouldn't. Rijker was clearly a special fighter.

ENTER THE OCTAGON

BY GARETH A DAVIES

NEWELL AND 'AZUL' LARA INSPIRE

The recent Bellator MMA card in Bridgeport, Connecticut, was headlined by two huge men in heavyweights Matt Mitrione and Sergei Kharitonov, won by the hulking Russian by second-round TKO (knee and punches in Round 2), but it was Nick Newell and Alejandra "Azul" Lara who intrigued me, for very different reasons.

After dropping two straight fights to champion Ilima-Lei Macfarlane and title contender Juliana Velasquez, Lara made two statements at Bellator 225. Moving up to bantamweight against Taylor Turner, Colombia's Lara danced out to the cage, defeated her opponent with ease and reinforced her views on the plight of the rain forest. Lara's transition to fighting from being a circus trapeze artist and high-wire dancer is also extraordinary.

Newell, meanwhile, winning his Bellator debut against Corey Browning by arm triangle submission, has captured the hearts and minds of fight fans – by dint of being himself. The 33-year-old was born with a congenital amputation of his left arm, which ends just below his elbow. He has a dextrous, very muscular left forearm which does everything in the place of a limb that never formed. He wrestled at the highest level in high school and at college in his home state of Connecticut, earning more than 300 victories. He then embarked on a career in mixed martial arts as a professional, and after almost a decade and 17 contests (15 victories),

DYLAN BUELL

Sergei Kharitonov charges Matt Mitrione during their August 24 heavyweight bout.

"Notorious" Newell, his fighting moniker, has competed on the two most powerful mixed martial arts fight leagues in the world: First there was the UFC, with Dana White's Contender series, and at Bellator 225, he won his fight in just three minutes. As Newell explained in one post-fight victory speech: "Life is a cold, hard place. You can either become a victim of circumstances or you can create your own."

You suspect he is even more driven because of his "perceived" disability, wanting to prove things to other human beings, always wanting to be a game-changer. He told me this week that it had never been a goal of his to prove anyone wrong. "I've always been someone to follow their heart and just do what felt right," he said. "I'm not someone who has let adversity stop them. Adversity comes in many different forms. I'd never compare my road to anyone else's, but I'm the man I am today because of it, and I stay grounded." His career as a one-armed fighter has been slow at times because of his disability and the reaction to it from other fighters. It was a lose-lose situation: If they won, they beat the guy with one arm, and if they lost, they lost to a guy with one arm. Go check him out on YouTube.

★★★

UFC MAKES CHINA BREAKTHROUGH

The UFC has long wished to establish itself in China, a potentially huge market for the sport and, of course, the area of the world that is the spiritual home of martial arts. The company got its wish on the last day in August in Shenzhen, when Zhang Weili ripped the UFC women's strawweight title from Jessica Andrade of Brazil in just

42 seconds by TKO (knees and strikes) in the main event – the UFC's third foray into mainland China.

"I felt so excited to win the title. It is like a fantastic dream coming true," said Zhang, the 5-foot-4, 30-year-old known as "Magnum," having lost her first-ever fight but now undefeated on a 20-fight streak. "I think the keys to my win were my calm mind-set and the strategy defined by my coaches. All the strategies were practical, predicted each important point and helped me seize every opportunity. Also, I did a great job in adjusting my mind-set. When I fought overseas, my team was not there with me because of visa issues. But I performed well last year in Beijing, and I won the belt this year in Shenzhen since all my coaches are here with me, supporting me.

"I don't have a name for my next opponent right now. I will take whoever UFC gives to me. But personally, I will take a long sleep tonight and rest."

★ ★ ★

TOURNAMENT FORMAT WORKING FOR BELLATOR

Bellator's welterweight tournament looks to be a spectacular addition to the fight world's calendar. The company has had immense success with its welterweight and heavyweight tournaments, bringing in huge investment from DAZN – I understand it to be in the region of $130 million over three years for over 20 exclusive broadcast events – generating genuine interest in new fans with an ambitious signing program and widening range of countries where events are staged.

Ryan Bader won the heavyweight tournament, and current welterweight champion Rory MacDonald will rematch Douglas Lima in the 170-pound denouement at Mohegan Sun, Connecticut, on October 26.

The new featherweight tournament, which started in September, needed a 16-man roster, given the depth of its division, now the strongest anywhere.

"I'm expecting fireworks. We had so much talent in this division, we couldn't do an eight-man tournament. We probably could have put another eight to 10 fighters in it," Bellator president Scott Coker told me.

Gegard Mousasi (left) stares down Rory MacDonald during the presser for their 2018 showdown.

"We are going to have reserve fights. We've had some great tournaments at Bellator. It all comes to a head in the welterweight tournament. As far as depth and field of talent, this is probably the best one (overall). We have the best featherweights on the planet right now, and that's just how I feel.

"The pacing will be the same. We'll keep them in order. We'll go December, January, February and March. We'll keep this thing moving and have the finals in September 2020."

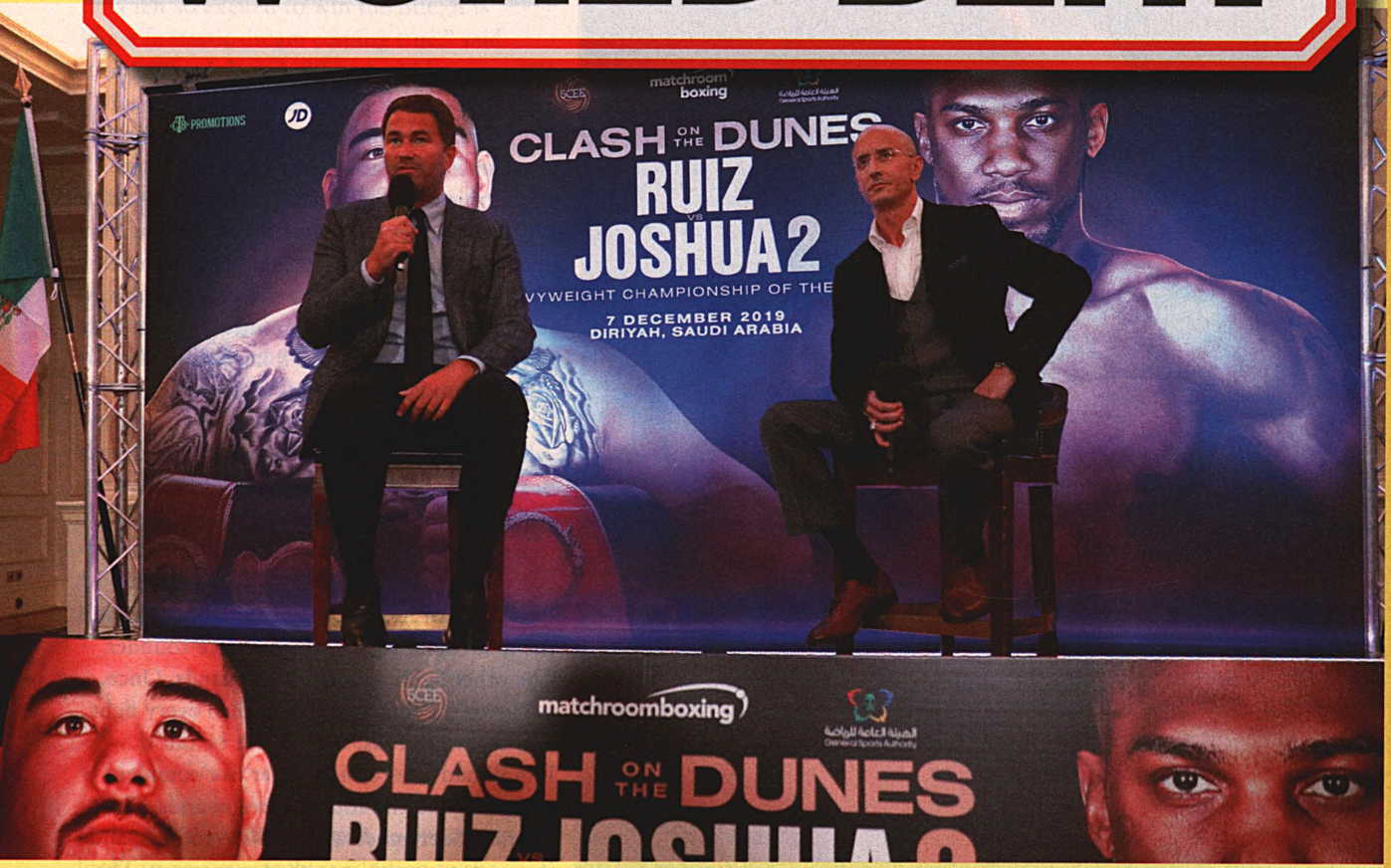
The featherweight belt currently held by Brazilian fighter Patricio "Pitbull" Freire will be up for grabs in each round of the tournament. "The belt will be on the line every fight," added Coker. "The fight with Pitbull (Juan Archuleta faces the Brazilian in the first round of 16) will be a five-rounder. The other fights will be three rounds. Once we go to the final eight men, then every fight will be five rounds. It wouldn't be fair if Pitbull had five-rounder after five-rounder and everyone else fought three rounds. The fights in September will be three rounds, and if you win, you go into the tournament. The September fights are like your invite into the tournament."

★ ★ ★

And finally... Yes, I did challenge current British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to a cage fight some years back – and he readily accepted. When Johnson was mayor of London, in what I might call a mischievous moment when he was being irritating, I threw down the gauntlet at a drinks reception. "I'm challenging you to a cage fight. Fancy it?" I said to Alexander Boris de Pfeffel. The response was immediate, no hesitation. "I fight at 217 pounds. When and where does it go down?" said the blonde-haired politician, looking me straight in the eye. To be fair, he looked more like 237 pounds. Alas, it never happened. O me miserum, I so wish it had. I'm around 198 pounds and still ready to rumble, Boris. RING

Gareth A Davies is MMA Correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph.

WORLD BEAT



Eddie Hearn and Omar Khalil take questions during the Ruiz-Joshua 2 press conference in London.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

In a high-risk, high-reward rematch, British heavyweight Anthony Joshua will attempt to reclaim his pride, standing and three world title belts from Andy Ruiz Jr. in Diriyah, on the outskirts of the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh, on December 7. But the choice of venue was heavily criticized across global media platforms.

Promoter Eddie Hearn, chairing the official announcement at The Savoy, the famed hotel in London's Strand owned by Saudi Royalty, admitted that his team and Joshua had "expected criticism and controversy" when it was announced. One prominent feature writer in the U.K. called it a "greedy, soulless, misconceived Saudi enterprise" as plans took shape with a purpose-built stadium at the heritage site for between 12,000-15,000 spectators to see what was dubbed the "Clash on the Dunes." It was understood that Saudi sports entities had put up close to $100 million for the contest to take place there. Within hours of the fight being announced, the British boxer was urged to reconsider the fight's venue by Amnesty International. "As with other sporting stars going to Saudi Arabia, we'd call on Joshua to inform himself of the human rights situation and be prepared to speak out about Saudi Arabia's abysmal human rights record," Felix Jakens, Amnesty International U.K.'s head of campaigns, had said. His comments were broadcasted across myriad channels. "If Anthony Joshua fights Andy Ruiz Jr. in Saudi Arabia, it's likely to be yet another opportunity for the Saudi authorities to try to 'sportswash' their severely tarnished image.

"Despite some long-overdue reforms on women's rights, Saudi Arabia is currently in the grip of a sweeping human rights crackdown – with women's rights activists, lawyers and members of the Shia minority community all being targeted," Jakens said. "There's been no justice over the gruesome murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen is carrying out indiscriminate attacks on homes, hospitals and marketplaces with horrific consequences for civilians." Even Ruiz made noises, initially questioning issues such as security

in the Middle East – as well as the judges and testing (it will be VADA) – but the agreements on both sides were inked three weeks later.

Hearn said: "I knew that when we made the decision, not every response would be positive, that there would be criticism and controversy. If you look at the bigger picture, this is a chance not just for boxing but for AJ. You can talk about events in the past – whether it's Rumble in the Jungle or Thrilla in Manila – and I put this in the same kind of league. Joshua has always had the mindset that he wanted to box all over the world. Will he be back in the U.K.? Yes. But I also expect him to box not just in Saudi but in Nigeria, in China. Iconic, global fights." Fine.

Time will tell whether the dance in the desert was the best move.

★★★

Complexities just days after Dillian Whyte defeated Oscar Rivas in London are likely to force boxing's authorities and testing administrators to make changes. Whyte was cleared to fight Rivas by U.K. Anti-Doping's independent panel in the week of the fight (after an alleged adverse finding), and the boxer and promoter Hearn were within their rights in the regulations not to inform the Colombian opponent, but it seemed neither ethically nor morally right. It left UKAD, the British Boxing Board, the promoter Hearn, and indeed British boxing, open to ridicule.

Was there a duty of care to inform Rivas? The issue had only come to light when it was revealed in an article by Thomas Hauser on Boxingscene.com five days after the fight itself.

As The Ring went to press a month after the issue, there was still no comment from UKAD or the Boxing Board. Hearn, meanwhile, insisted Whyte will clear his name, especially given the independent panel had permitted him to fight. Whyte, in the meantime, was removed as mandatory challenger to the WBC heavyweight title until the matter is resolved. Promoter Frank Warren called for "an independent review at government level" to examine the relationship between UKAD and the Boxing Board to ensure that incidents such as this are dealt with transparently.

★★★

Inexperience. It was glaring as Anthony Yarde's challenge for the WBO light heavyweight title against Sergey Kovalev fell flat in Chelyabinsk, Russia. We learned in Russia that Yarde was not ready – at least not for a champion of Kovalev's quality – and that the great Russian is close to the end. Yarde was outboxed for all but two rounds and finally stopped in the 11th, yet he came close to stopping his foe in a perilous eighth frame. There was resounding praise from former two-division unified champion Andre Ward, who twice defeated Kovalev. He was spot on: "Anthony Yarde was two, three punches away from stopping Kovalev. Yarde can fight. He just needs to make adjustments with his camp. Respect to him. Kovalev

BRADLEY COLLYER

As of press time, UKAD still hadn't explained why they cleared Dillian Whyte to fight Oscar Rivas following a positive PED test.

proved he's still got something left, but he needs to grab that fight with Canelo Alvarez. At this point, every fight will be hard for him." True. But still a bit of a dig.

★★★

Undefeated WBO super middleweight titleholder Billy Joe Saunders signed a multi-fight promotional deal with Hearn's Matchroom Boxing in a bid to target megafights with Canelo, Gennady Golovkin and Callum Smith. "I'm on Golovkin and Canelo's turf now," explained Saunders, now under the same DAZN banner as the world's two leading middleweights. "I can't wait to be involved in those big nights. If that means fighting at 168 pounds or 8 pounds lighter, then that's no problem. I'm ready to go."

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

Long before Manny Pacquiao became the "National Fist," Gabriel "Flash" Elorde was the fighting pride of the Philippines, captivating the imagination of the post-colonial country with his victories at home and abroad. His seven-year reign as junior lightweight champion from 1960-1967 is the longest in boxing history for the 130-pound division and earned him a spot in the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1993.

Juan Miguel Elorde always knew his family was into boxing, but it wasn't until he looked in his second-grade history book and saw a fighter with his last name that he got the idea of how big a deal his grandfather was.

"They're saying, 'Oh, it's your grandfather, he's famous,'" said "Mig" Elorde. His mother, Liza, remembers him bringing his book to her for confirmation.

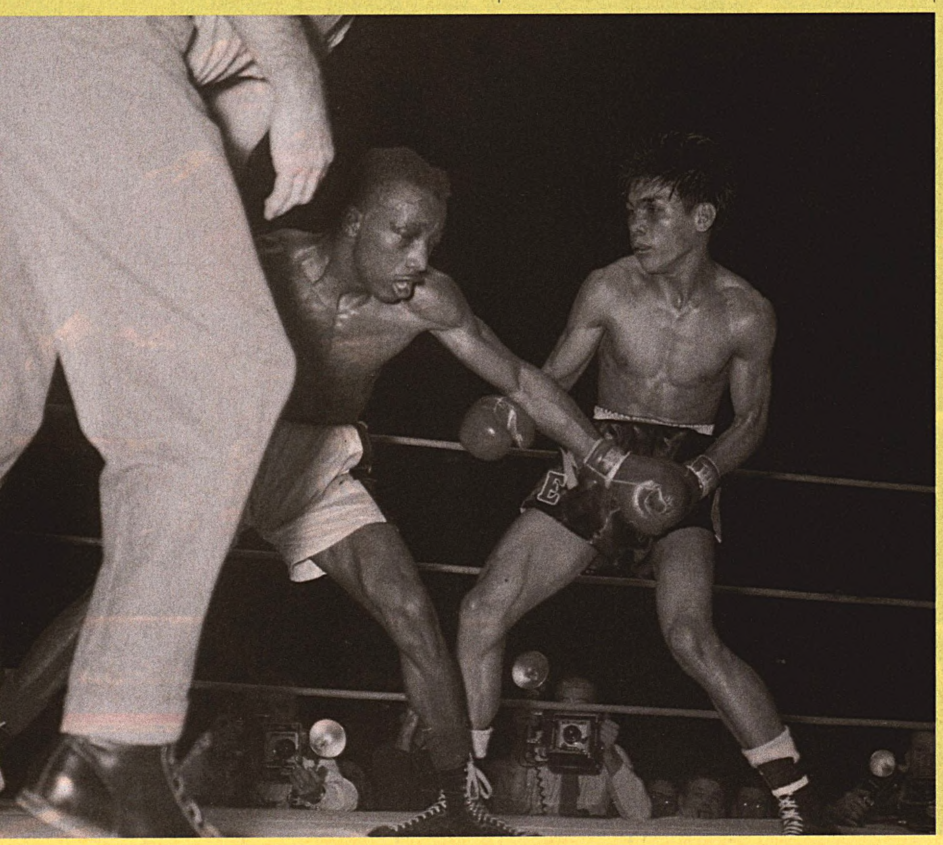
"They were having a test, so I said, 'Mig, you won't get a zero in your test, because one of the questions was who is the greatest Filipino fighter. So you could easily answer that it was your grandfather.' So of course he laughed."

Elorde (28-1, 15 KOs) will try to join his grandfather as a world champion on September 14 when he faces WBO junior featherweight titleholder Emanuel Navarrete at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas on the Tyson Fury-Otto Wallin card.

The legacy casts a shadow over everything around Elorde. He trains at the Elorde Gym in Sucat, Paranaque City, which his grandfather finished building in 1978, and has fought 16 of his 29 pro bouts at the ballroom upstairs that bears the "Flash" name. He even looks like his grandfather and shares a similar benevolence for the less fortunate in his community, helping out at St. Rita's Orphanage, which his grandfather helped found when he was champion. His older brother, Juan Martin "Bai" Elorde, and cousin J.K. Elorde both have pro careers as well.

Elorde, 32, knows he has an uphill battle with Navarette (28-1, 22 KOs), who pummeled Isaac Dogboe in two meetings and made short work of the overmatched Francisco De Vaca in his second title defense. Elorde, whose best punch is his left hook, figures he has to hurt Navarrete with something early on to get his respect and prevent him from overwhelming him with his intense workrate.

"I want to prove that I can also be like (my grandfather)," said Elorde. "Even though it's hard, I want to prove to everyone that I can also be a world champion."



Flash Elorde battles legendary featherweight champ Sandy Saddler during their 1956 rematch in San Francisco.

★★★

After John Riel Casimero lost a surprise decision to Jonas Sultan two years ago, it was hard to imagine a path back to relevance. He found it three pounds north at bantamweight, where he stamped his ticket to a mandatory shot at WBO titleholder Zolani Tete by knocking Cesar Ramirez out cold in the 10th round on August 24 in Manila. It was a wild affair, with Casimero (28-4, 19 KOs) scoring four knockdowns and surviving some big shots from his Mexican challenger before turning out the lights with a single right hand.

The Tete-Casimero fight is expected to take place in the U.S. in November. Tete hasn't made a mandatory defense since April of 2018 and had been in the World Boxing Super Series before an injury to his right shoulder forced his withdrawal.

The Philippines was prepared to send five boxers to the 2019 AIBA World Championships in Yekaterinburg, Russia, at press time. The roster included flyweight Carlo Paalam, bantamweight Ian Clark Bautista, junior welterweight James Palicte, middleweight Eumir Marcial and light heavyweight John Marvin, according to ABAP Executive Director Ed Picson. The Philippines has never won gold at the men's championships, though they've come close with silvers from Harry Tanamor (2007) and Roel Velasco (1997). Velasco, Ronald Chavez and Donald Abnett were set to coach the team for the tournament, which runs September 7-21.

The Philippines is down a world titleholder after Vic Saludar lost his WBO strawweight belt to Wilfredo Mendez on August 25 in Puerto Rico. Saludar was making the second defense of his belt against his mandatory challenger, and despite scoring a third round knockdown, was unable to solidify a victory, losing by the scores of 117-110, 116-111 and 115-112. Saludar, 28, had traveled to Puerto Rico four days before the fight without his trainer Michael Palacios, who could not obtain a visa, and promoter Kenneth Rontal, who had a family emergency.

The loss leaves just three world titleholders from the Philippines: Manny Pacquiao (WBA welterweight), Nonito Donaire (WBA bantamweight) and Jerwin Ancajas (IBF junior bantamweight).

Speaking of Pacquiao, he really knows how to declare victory. Less than a month after his thrilling split decision win over Keith Thurman, he debuted his newest pet: a pitbull named "Thurman." It could be worse; it could have been a poodle.

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SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The 115-pound division is as stacked in South Africa as it is on the world scene. At least three fighters are hovering outside the top 10 in veteran Gideon Buthelezi, Athenkosi Dumezweni and hot prospect Yanga Sigqibo.

Two of them were in action during July. With only four knockouts in a 26-fight career going into his fight with Mexico's Adrian Jimenez, the one thing nobody expected from Gideon Buthelezi was a quick blowout. But that is exactly what he delivered at the East London International Convention Center.

The visitor started aggressively, tossing rights and winging left hooks with abandon, no doubt hoping to nail the South African, who had been stopped on three previous occasions. Buthelezi, however, showed his experience and kept calm under fire. He hurt Jimenez with a left hook from his southpaw stance, which was followed by a head-snapping left uppercut and – somewhat out of character – he went for the kill.

A follow-up combination pinned

Veteran junior bantamweight Gideon Buthelezi scored a rare first-round stoppage against Adrian Jimenez on July 27.

Jimenez on the ropes, made his eyes roll in their sockets and deposited him in a heap on the canvas, prompting the referee to wave the fight over in the first round. The Mexican drops to 13-2-2.

Buthelezi has had his ups and downs. There was a win over former Ring 108-pound champion Hekkie Budler and a second-round knockout loss to Adrian Hernandez in a challenge for the WBC junior flyweight title back in 2011, but he hasn't lost since 2015, when he dropped a split decision to Lwandile Sityatha, and has now won eight in a row, bringing his record to 22-5.

He has won whatever is available on the local scene as well as fringe belts in three weight divisions, and one would like to see him get one more shot at a major title.

On the same card, Yanga "Showtime" Sigqibo lived up to his nickname, putting on a boxing clinic while outpointing Filipino Joseph Ambo over 12 rounds by identical scores of 120-107.

The slickster, who likes to box on his toes, gave a fine display of jabbing, skillfully utilizing punches to the head and body and mixing in the odd power shot or combination when the opening presented itself.

In the fourth, he scored a knockdown courtesy of a left hook, but Ambo was nothing if not tough and kept pressing forward, although he could never really sustain any offensive momentum.

Sigqibo moves to 13-1-1 while Ambo drops to 9-2-1.

★★★

In the second tournament of the weekend in the same city, junior featherweight Ludumo "9mm" Lamati, fighting at the legendary Orient Theater, brought his record to 16-0-1 (10 KOs) after three-time world title challenger Richie Mepranum retired in his corner after 10 rounds.

The rangy youngster scored pretty much as he pleased against a veteran opponent who was there to survive, but there is still work to be done should Lamati wish to follow in the footsteps of the local legends of the division, such as Welcome Ncita, Vuyani Bungu, Takalani Ndlovu and Jeffrey Mathebula.

★★★

Welterweight fringe contender Chris "The Heat" van Heerden is probably best known for his last loss back in 2015 – hanging tough against Errol Spence Jr. before getting stopped in eight rounds.

Putting that fight aside, his story is inspiring simply for the grit and resilience he has exhibited to remain in the mix. He left South Africa in 2014 to make his own luck in the U.S. and had many obstacles thrown in his way. There were tough wars and the violent death of his father, as well as inactivity, and just when it looked like he had some momentum going after outpointing Timo Schwarzkopf in the first leg of a welterweight tournament in 2018, the tournament got canceled.

He finally signed with Top Rank this year, won a six-round technical decision over journeyman Mahonri Montes and was then matched against tough Russian Aslanbek Kozaev in Los Angeles.

With van Heerden, one always worries how much further he can rev his engine in the red, but for this fight at least, that concern proved unfounded.

Cut over both eyes from accidental headbutts, the southpaw van Heerden moved exceptionally well in the face of pressure from Kozaev, peppering the Russian with a steady stream of jabs, as well as left-uppercut-right hook combos. He got the better of spirited exchanges in the seventh that made the crowd come alive and had Kozaev looking wobbly. In the final round, he even mixed in a shuffle or two, shoe-shining Kozaev for the fans' gratification. Kozaev (33-3-1, 8

Junior featherweight Ludumo Lamati remained unbeaten with a 10th-round stoppage of former title challenger Richie Mepranum.

KOs) made things interesting, but the result was never in doubt; van Heerden prevailed by scores 79-73, 79-73 and 78-74, moving his record to 28-2-1 (12 KOs).

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Despite being home to seven men and seven women who can claim some form of world-title recognition, the Japanese boxing industry isn't healthy and it hasn't been for quite some time.

The number of active professional boxers, the number fight cards and the number of fans attending boxing events have been steadily decreasing during this decade. Industry people have been racking their brains for a solution to the sagging interest in the sport for years, but an upstart company called Dangan (which means "a bullet" in Japanese) believes it has the key to reviving the Japan boxing scene: tournaments.

Dangan is promoting two tournaments for eight-round-level fighters that are named after national boxing legends that retired last year: the God's Left Bantamweight Tournament, named after former Ring Magazine/WBC bantamweight champion Shinsuke Yamanaka (a southpaw whose deadly left-hand punch was called "God's Left") and the Knockout Dynamite Tournament, which will be presented by Takashi Uchiyama, a dominant former WBA 130-pound titleholder who was nicknamed "Knockout Dynamite." The God's Left tournament is obviously for bantamweights, while the Knockout Dynamite tourney is for junior lightweights, but Dangan is looking for four-participant tournaments in other weight classes, too, such as junior featherweight and junior welterweight. Each individual contest is scheduled for five rounds to encourage quicker-paced fights and knockouts.

The first round of the God's Left bantamweight tournament took place on July 23 at Tokyo's famous Korakuen Hall. Jin Minamide (4-0, 3 KOs) won a close decision over Japanese youth champion Tetsu Araki (14-2-1, 2 KOs) by scores of 58-56, 58-56 and 58-57. Hard-hitting Kenya Yamashita (14-5, 11 KOs) knocked out Gaku Aikawa (9-8-1, 3 KOs) at 2:10 in the second round. And left-handed puncher Kazuki Nakajima (7-0, 6 KOs) stopped Kenichi Watanabe (8-5-1, 4 KOs) at 2:02 in the opening round; as Nakajima's right uppercut sent Watanabe to the canvas, the referee halted the contest immediately. The semifinal is set for November 9 at the same venue. Yamashita, managed by Joji Morikawa, will face seeded Seiya Tsutsumi (5-0, 4 KOs). Nakajima, a stablemate of Ring Magazine bantamweight champion Naoya Inoue, will square off with Minamide.

★★★

Muscular slugger Takeshi Inoue (14-1-1, 8 KOs), who impressed people with his determined attack throughout 12 rounds against WBO 154-pound beltholder Jaime Munguia in January in Texas, returned to the ring and knocked out Thai journeyman Komsan Polsan (38-11-1, 24 KOs) in the second round on August 3 at Korakuen Hall. Inoue is known for his persistent infighting style, described as "silk spider," but this time he boxed behind solid jabs to connect right crosses and left hooks to the body. It worked out well. In the second round, Inoue showed quick combinations that ended with a left hand to the liver. The Thai fighter dropped to a knee and could not beat the count.

In the co-main event, Kazuto Takesako (11-0-1, 11 KOs) retired Shuji Kato (10-2-2, 6 KOs) after the eighth round to defend his Japanese middleweight title. It was a direct rematch of the spirited draw the two fought in March. The heavy-handed champion, who was confused by Kato's slick southpaw style in the first fight, was not bothered by the challenger's light jabs and straight lefts this time and was able to get inside. Only once, in the fifth round, was Takesako stumbled by a Kato right counter. He survived and got right back on his offense. In the eighth round, the Japanese champion landed a solid right and started rushing. The loud cheering made it hard to hear the bell, and the referee could not stop Takesako from landing two extra savage punches that sent Kato to the canvas. It was a similar situation to the cruiserweight title fight between Mairis Briedis and Krzysztof Glowacki in June in Latvia, but this time, the fighter who landed the illegal punches did not know the bell had rung (Briedis confessed he knew), and the cornermen of the fighter who suffered unnecessary damage sensibly decided to pull out of the fight to protect their fighter from further danger. (It could be ruled a no-contest, but there was no dispute, as Takesako was already overwhelmed by Kato.) Takesako, who was the final opponent of Ryota Murata's amateur career, accompanied Takeshi Inoue to America for the Munguia fight seven months ago. Inoue told his younger stablemate that the top of the world would not be unreachable. "I have not proved myself yet, but I keep going to fight for a world title," Takesako said in the ring after his victory over Kato.

★★★

The 122-pound division in Japan is currently stacked with many talents targeting world title shots. Hiroaki Teshigawara (20-2-2, 13 KOs) is among them and put

forth an impressive performance against Shohei Omori (20-3, 15 KOs), whom he stopped at 2:36 of the 12th round on August 8 at Korakuen Hall. Teshigawara's awkward, off-guard style muddled southpaw Omori with unpredictable timing and punches from the beginning of the fight. He cut the opponent's right eyelid with a legal punch in the fifth round. Omori tried to turn it around with a good body shot, but Teshigawara survived it and overwhelmed his rival again until the referee decided to stop the fight just 24 seconds before the final bell. "I was extremely nervous about this fight, but I believed I was more determined to win this fight than him. I gave it all I have," the winner said. Both started their professional careers in 2011, and now both are rated by major world sanctioning bodies, although they took different paths. While Omori, a good amateur, was prominent from the beginning, winning rookie tournaments and the Japanese championship on his way to facing Marlon Tapales for the vacant WBO bantamweight title in 2017, Teshigawara had no luck with belts until he won the WBO Asian Pacific bantamweight title in 2017. This victory meant a lot to him, as it came against Jetro Pabustan, somebody he had always looked up to, and now he has put his focus on a world championship. Teshigawara survived a hopeless childhood; while housed in a reformatory, a book about "Man on Fire" Koichi Wajima, a three-time world titlist at 154 pounds, opened his eyes. Teshigawara joined the boxing gym run by Wajima in Tokyo. Thus a boy saved by boxing keeps writing a success story of his own.

Hiroaki Teshigawara is on an eight-bout win streak.

Yuriko Miyata has covered the Japanese boxing scene for more than 20 years.

CANADA

BY JAMIE REBNER

In boxing, it's said that every great fighter has one last great fight left in them and that the last thing to go is their punch. Both maxims were on display on August 3 in Brooklyn, New York, on the Adam Kownacki-Chris Arreola undercard, when former light heavyweight champion Jean Pascal scored a major upset over Marcus Browne. The fight was stopped in the eighth round after an accidental head clash opened a considerable gash on Browne. Quebec's Pascal was awarded the victory by the slightest margin, with all three judges scoring it by one point in his favor, the abbreviated last round being the deciding factor.

Pascal was able to lean on his explosive power, causing three knockdowns that ended up being crucial – without them, Browne would have likely been ahead on points, having successfully outboxed the Canadian for much of the contest. With the victory, Pascal gave his career a much-needed boost. Having gone 4-4 in his previous eight contests, the most recent being a one-sided decision loss to Dmitry Bivol, he was certainly on the downside of his career. But even at 36 years old, Pascal had enough power, timing and accuracy to turn back Browne's spirited effort and likely earn another big fight.

But as far as I'm concerned, this is the perfect opportunity to retire for the second and hopefully last time. Although Pascal still clearly has the power to change the course of a fight, his defensive reflexes have eroded, causing him to get hit with regularity. That doesn't bode well should he take on the likes of Oleksandr Gvozdyk, Artur Beterbiev and Badou Jack, just as it didn't against Bivol, Sergey Kovalev and Eleider Alvarez.

It's understandable that Pascal would want to capitalize on his impressive performance and leverage a few more sizeable paydays. This is a brutal sport, and you have to maximize your earning potential while you can. However, we've also seen countless fighters stick around too long only to be forced out via an unnecessary drubbing at the hands of a fresher fighter on the way up.

Having witnessed firsthand the highs and lows of Pascal's career at the Bell Center in Montreal, including his lineal title-winning upset over Chad Dawson in 2010 as well as his decisive loss to Kovalev in their 2016 rematch, I have the utmost respect for Pascal and what he's accomplished. He fought virtually every top competitor at his weight, and while he didn't win them all, he gave every ounce of effort whenever he stepped between the ropes. His heart and desire can never be questioned, because he was always willing to absorb punishment in order to land his potent, fight-changing bombs and go out on his shield in search of victory. I wish him the best of luck in the remainder of his career, but I am hoping he doesn't have to endure too much additional punishment before he calls it quits for good.

★★★

As introduced by Gareth A. Davies in his U.K. "World Beat" column last month, there was plenty of controversy in the

aftermath of the July 20 bout at the O2 in London between adopted Montrealer Oscar "Kaboom" Rivas and Dillian Whyte of England. Whyte overcame a ninth-round knockdown to secure a unanimous points decision, handing the Colombian his first defeat as a pro.

After the fight, we learned of several blatant mishandlings by the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBofC) as well as United Kingdom Anti-Doping (UKAD). First off, as reported in The Athletic, there was an issue with Whyte's gloves. Although Rivas' team approved Whyte's initial selection of gloves at the pre-fight meeting, they were not the ones Whyte wore into the ring. Russ Anber, Rivas' cutman, vehemently disapproved of this last-minute development and demanded Whyte's gloves be removed so he could inspect them. However, The BBBofC officials didn't allow that to happen, claiming it was too late, and no inspection took place, jeopardizing Rivas' health and safety.

Anber is rightfully fuming at the BBBofC: "We have enough experience to know what a glove is supposed to feel like. And I'm not implying that there were any improprieties with the glove. We just don't know, because we were never able to see the gloves. I'll get better with time, but I've only been doing this 40 years. It's not the first time I've seen gamesmanship, but it's the first time I've seen a commission not want to be transparent to both sides. I've never seen anything like this."

Somehow that wasn't the commission's sole display of negligence. According to a BoxingScene report, Whyte had tested positive for two banned substances before the bout, both byproducts of the anabolic steroid Dianabol. Whyte's camp, including his promoter, Eddie Hearn of Matchroom Boxing, apparently knew of the adverse finding but never felt the need to mention it to Rivas' team because of a hearing that took place after the test findings (but just before the fight), in which Whyte was cleared to fight by UKAD and the BBBofC.

Rivas' promoter, Yvon Michel, can't believe how this whole situation went down. "I am still amazed at what has happened, and more, I don't understand what has been the overall process," Michel said in a text message to The Athletic. "If Whyte tested positive for a PED, why has he been cleared to fight? On what ground or rules? Nobody told us anything regarding this situation before the fight or after; we only learn information through media. We are now collecting information wherever it is available and we will take (steps) in order to protect Oscar Rivas' interest."

Michel has retained the services of JMW Solicitors, a British law firm, which has sent letters to Matchroom, Whyte, UKAD and the BBBofC. The letters ask for information that might be relevant to a legal claim. Given the blatant errors that occurred, no one can fault Rivas' team for going after all parties involved in court, because they need to be held accountable. Unfortunately, it could be a long while before it gets sorted out.

★★★

Montreal resident Artur Beterbiev (14-0, 14 KOs) is set for a tantalizing title-unification bout against Ukraine's Oleksandr Gvozdyk (17-0, 14 KOs) in one of the best fights that can be made at light heavyweight, given that both represent the division's elite. The Russian Beterbiev already owns an amateur win over Gvozdyk, who will be seeking to avenge that loss and move one step closer to undisputed status. Philadelphia's Liacouras Center will be the host of this highly anticipated matchup, and those in attendance will surely be treated to a dramatic main event on October 18. RING

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KEEP THE LIGHTS ON

James Toney posted brilliant victories during his middleweight reign, but he also had some close calls. In the fourth defense of his IBF title, Toney faced off against the undistinguished Dave Tiberi at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City on February 8, 1992. Far from being a household name, the challenger was expected to be easy pickings for "Lights Out," who was unbeaten in 30 fights and a pound-for-pound entrant. Tiberi hadn't read the script. In his only world title bout, the Delaware-based volume-puncher kept his foot on the gas throughout, outworking Toney in most of the sessions. At the end of 12 rounds, one judge scored 117-111 in favor of Tiberi, whereas the other two officials sided with the weight-drained champion by a three-point margin. This was without question one of the most contentious verdicts of the decade. Tiberi never fought again.

COMING UP

Errol Spence and Shawn Porter engage in a press-conference staredown.

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 28 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Shawn Porter, welterweights (for Spence's IBF and Porter's WBC titles), Los Angeles (Fox PPV). Also, Anthony Dirrell vs. David Benavidez, super middleweights (for Dirrell's' WBC title).

OCTOBER

OCT. 1 – Hiroto Kyoguchi vs. Tetsuya Hisada, junior flyweights (for Kyoguchi's Ring/WBA titles), Osaka, Japan.
OCT. 5 – Gennadiy Golovkin vs. Sergiy Derevyanchenko, middleweights (for vacant IBF title), New York (DAZN).
OCT. 5 – Claressa Shields vs. Ivana Habazin, junior middleweights (for vacant WBC/WBO titles), Flint, Michigan (Showtime).
OCT. 5 – Junto Nakatani vs. Milan Melindo, junior bantamweights, Tokyo.
OCT. 12 – Aleksandr Usyk vs. TBA, heavyweights, Chicago (DAZN).
OCT. 18 – Oleksandr Gvozdyk vs. Artur Beterbiev, light heavyweights (for Gvozdyk's WBC and Beterbiev's IBF titles) (ESPN).

NOVEMBER

NOV. 7 – Naoya Inoue vs. Nonito Donaire, bantamweights (for Inoue's Ring/IBF and Donaire's WBA titles), Saitama, Japan (DAZN). Also, Nordine Oubaali vs. Takuma Inoue, bantamweights (for Oubaali's WBC title).
NOV. 9 – Jamel Herring vs. Lamont Roach Jr., junior lightweights (for Herring's WBO title) (ESPN+).
NOV. 23 – Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), location TBA (Showtime).

DECEMBER

DEC. 7 – Andy Ruiz Jr. vs. Anthony Joshua, heavyweights (for Ruiz's IBF/WBA/WBO titles), Diriyah, Saudi Arabia (DAZN).

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